

## REVIEWS

***The Archaeology of Elam: Formation and Transformation of an Ancient Iranian State***, Daniel T. Potts, Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1999, 490 pp.

In this book's preface, the author says that his purpose in writing this book is to present a cogent, readable, and up-to-date synthesis of what is known about the archaeology and history of Elam. *The Archaeology of Elam*, a volume in the Cambridge World Archaeology Series, is notably successful in meeting that goal.

This is, to be sure, a scholarly book aimed at an audience of scholars, and what is cogent and readable for a professional historian or archaeologist can seem dense, abstruse, and pedantic to a general reader. Anyone looking for a quick and easy summary of Elam's role in Middle Eastern history will not find it here, and readers hoping for simple answers to complex questions and glib resolutions to difficult historical issues will find themselves disappointed. But these are caveats, not criticisms. This book demands careful reading and concentrated attention, but it offers rich rewards to anyone willing to give it the time and attention it deserves.

It is fortunate that Potts's book takes a broad perspective and is so richly referenced and factually detailed, because there is no other up-to-date source that covers the subject. *The Lost World of Elam*, by Walther Hinz (1972), was published more than thirty years ago and was aimed at a general rather than a professional audience. *Elam: Surveys of Political History and Archaeology*, by Elizabeth Carter and Matthew W. Stolper (1984), presents a thorough and scholarly discussion of ancient Elam, but it is over two decades old and, because it was written in two independent halves treating the textual and archaeological data separately, it does not effectively integrate the textual and archaeological data pertaining to Elam into a coherent whole.

influence of the priesthood not only concerning the historical circumstances but also the formation of the causes are those elements that created the historical reality of that time. The role and influence of the *mūbadān* on the society and their policy on the growth of Christian communities form part of the conflict between the two empires, i.e. the religious matter. The influence of the Zoroastrian priests on diplomatic affairs is made clear through research into the political and religious circumstances that characterize the opposition of both empires. Moreover, it has to be pointed out that the connection of the religious with other factors of the political reality dictated to a great extent the political intervention of the priests while the lack of political motives led, inevitably, to the suspension of any such intervention.

The combination "politics-religion" is one of the basic rules characterizing the diplomatic relations of the Later Roman and the Sasanian Empires. The influence of the priests behind the term "religion" became severe only when the term "politics" favored the aggravation of the relations between the two powers. The opposite however did not have consequences of the same order. "Religion" on many occasions activated "politics" but only when there were favorable political conditions. The Zoroastrian priests were capable of influencing the Sasanian king in favor of their goals but the results of their influence would be sufficient in case the *shāhānshāh* decided that the use of the religious element would be profitable for him and his policy. This decision would take place only in periods of great tension between the two states.<sup>112</sup> However, the same did not happen when the relations of the two powers were not in tension, e.g. the case of Yazdgird I. It could then be supported that the influential policy of the *mūbadānmūbad* was applicable only when the political aims of the Sasanians could be identified with his own, especially concerning the Sasanian policy towards Constantinople and the Christian communities.

<sup>112</sup> Persecutions of great scale against the Christian communities took place usually in times of war, e.g. Yazdgird I (end of his reign), Bahrām V (420-422) and Yazdgird (446-448). See Bröck, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

towards Christians can be interpreted within the framework described above.

The pro-Christian policy of Yazdgird I was a way of the Sasanian king to preserve friendly relations with the Romans. This policy was in complete contrast to the interests of the Zoroastrian priesthood and the hard line policy of the later Sasanian kings. The influence of the Zoroastrian priests on the internal political scene of the Sasanian Empire, would have strong consequences (the Roman-Persian War of 421-422 and period of great political tension) for the relations between the Sasanians and the Romans. One of the most important successes of the Zoroastrian priesthood throughout the fifth century was the protection and preservation of the Zoroastrian communities in the Roman Empire. It was the status of mutuality that was established in the second decade (414-422) for the protection of Christian and Zoroastrian communities in both empires. Moreover, the Zoroastrian priesthood's policy of expansion for the Zoroastrian religion in Armenia was intensive but not fruitful. In spite of the negative result for the interests of the *mūbadān*, Armenia is a good example of the religious policy of expansion that they pursued in close collaboration with the political plans of the Sasanian king in the region.

## Conclusions

The influence and intervention of the Zoroastrian priesthood on the foreign relations between Sasanian Iran and the Later Roman Empire is not described clearly in the historical sources. On the contrary, the presence of the priests becomes clear through the comparison with other similar evidence of several sources (inscriptions, rock-reliefs, coins, seals, etc.). There is no reference in any sources about a direct intervention of the priests in diplomatic events, like negotiations, treaties, etc. This silence of the sources about the political role of the Zoroastrian priesthood does not provide the researcher with the comfort and certainty that a direct written access to the past gives. However, the combination of the information from several written sources gives important materials for stable conclusions as well as suppositions as have been made in this paper.

Broadly speaking, the intervention of the Zoroastrian priesthood was a vital aspect in the diplomatic relations of the Sasanian and the Later Roman Empire in the 5th cent. The understanding of the role and

eye on the region of Armenia as well as on the internal political scene of the empire so as not to diminish its influence on the *shāhānshāh*.<sup>108</sup> During the reign of Kavād I (488-496/498-531), the religious-social sect of Mazdak troubled the political-social scene of Sasanian Iran, since Mazdak put under constant doubt the whole social status of the Sasanian Empire.<sup>109</sup> The fact that Mazdak came from the priestly class, he was a *mūbad* or *chief mūbad*,<sup>110</sup> shows that the Zoroastrian priesthood suffered from internal conflicts. Presumably, this kind of conflict took place from time to time but not to such an extent. The Zoroastrian priesthood had to cope with this crucial situation, especially since Mazdak had the support of Kavād I. Its role in the deposition of Kavād was vital and this can be understood through the political and religious frame of the Zoroastrian priesthood's policy at that time. During this period the attention of the Zoroastrian priesthood would be focused on this internal problem, putting aside, for that moment, the issue of relations with the Romans, since the two empires did not face any serious political problems with each other at that time.<sup>111</sup>

On the whole, Sasanian-Roman foreign relations during the fifth century are closely related to the socio-political and religious situation of the internal scene of the Sasanian Empire. The examination of the internal political and religious status in the Sasanian lands is necessary to understand the foreign relations of the two empires and in particular the involvement of the Zoroastrian priesthood in these relations. The tolerant policy of Yazdgird I

108. The influence of the clergy on the decisions and policy of the *shāhānshāh* was based on the continuous state of being alert by the priesthood, since each king tried to limit the influence and the privileges of the *mūbadānmūbad*. The case of Balāsh (484-488) is distinctive. According to Joshua the Stylite, he was really disliked by the priesthood because he was trying to overthrow the customs and tradition of the Zoroastrian religion by multiplying the construction of baths all over his empire. The consequences of his policy were negative for him, since the *mūbadān* ordered the blinding of the Sasanian monarch and his deposition from the throne. See Joshua, *Chronicle*, pp. 12-13.

109. The new religious movement of the *mūbad* Mazdak due to its strong politic and social character was considered as heretic from the official religious authorities of Zoroastrianism. See E. Yarshater, "Mazdakism", *CHI* 3/2: 1006; P. Crone, "Kavad's Heresy and Mazdak's Revolt", *Iran* 29 (1991): 25-30.

110. Crone, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

111. Christensen, *op. cit.*, p. 416; R.N. Frye, *The History of Ancient Iran*, München 1984, pp. 322-325.

authorities were given a good pretext to begin a long effort of intervening in the doctrinal issues of the Christian communities. The Zoroastrian priests aimed at influencing the customs and the ecclesiastical life of the Christians by introducing/imposing several Zoroastrian concepts in the canons of the Eastern Church.<sup>104</sup> They wanted, at least, to eliminate any idea/practice that was against the Zoroastrian religious context. This intervention appears to be another aspect of the Zoroastrian policy towards the other religious groups of the Sasanian Empire. It is obvious that their role in the diplomatic relations of the Sasanian Empire was combined with several other strategies and plans adopted in the internal scene of the Sasanian Empire. The doctrinal impact upon Christianity was one such influence.

In the political scene of the Sasanian Empire, the answer of the Zoroastrian priests to the conciliatory policy of Balāsh was their probable participation in the deposition of the Sasanian king. It is very likely that the Zoroastrian priests allied with several powerful centers of the Iranian nobility in order to depose Balāsh. Their effort was successful. As soon as Kavād I ascended the throne and either due to the influence of the Zoroastrian priesthood and the nobility or for his own strategic reasons, he abandoned Balāsh's policy regarding Persarmenia; and he revived the policy of the Zoroastrian expansion as a means of consolidating the Sasanian power in the region.<sup>105</sup> Later on Kavād would reconsider his attitude towards the Armenians when he had to cope with their strong reaction while at the same time he would have to deal with the Mazdakite problem.<sup>106</sup> In fact, he would return to the previous treaty approved by Balāsh and would re-recognize their Christian character. The role of the Zoroastrian priesthood, although not obvious in the historical texts, can be traced through the results and the character of the events.

Throughout the second half of the fifth century there was generally a pacific climate in the relations between the two empires. This was not a result of the treaty of 441, but mainly due to the problems that both empires were facing with their neighbors.<sup>107</sup> The priests had to be cautious of the quick development of Christianity and at the same time had to keep a close

104. *Ibid.*, p. 115.

105. Joshua the Stylite, *The Chronicle of Joshua the Stylite*, ed. W. Wright, Cambridge University Press 1882, p. 20; Greatrex, *Rome and Persia at War*, p. 77.

106. Greatrex, *op. cit.*, p. 124.

107. Ostrogorsky, *op. cit.*, pp. 123-131.

Sasanian king in the region proved to be unrealistic. It was a total defeat for the interests of the *mūbadān* but not completely for the Sasanian king who compromised his demands by recognizing the Christian character of Armenia in order to preserve his political status in the region. However, the issue of Persarmenia would come up again during Kavād's reign.

A strong argument of the Zoroastrian priesthood, the accusations that the Christians of the Sasanian state were used as spies of the Roman authorities, would be valueless after 486. In the synod of Seleucia-Ctesiphon, it was decided that the only Christian doctrine would be that of Nestorianism.<sup>99</sup> The use of the Antiochene theological thought was a conscious effort of Bar Šaumā, the native metropolitan of Nisibis, and the native Christians, to devalue the *mūbadān*'s argument that the Christians were allies of the Romans.<sup>100</sup> The schism of the Roman and Persian Christianity was a fact, especially after the closure of the Nestorian School of Edessa and the emigration of its scholars to Nisibis which then onwards would be the educational center of Nestorianism in Sasanian Iran.<sup>101</sup>

In spite of the events mentioned above, the influence of the Zoroastrian priests in this synod (486) was more than striking. According to the decisions of the synod, some of the most basic principles of the Christian clerical life, such as celibacy for bishops and other positions of hierarchy, changed. It was decided that a bishop could get married.<sup>102</sup> In the synod of 497 it was also decided that even the *Catholicos*, the head of the ecclesiastical hierarchy of the Eastern Church, could contract a marriage.<sup>103</sup> This decision, amongst others, implied a strong influence from the Zoroastrian priests. Since several Christian ideas and practices like that of celibacy were offensive to the Zoroastrian sensibility, the Zoroastrian

99. A.J. Labourt, *Le Christianisme dans l'Empire Perse sous la dynastie Sassanide*, Paris 1904, pp. 143-152.

100. Barhebraeus, *Chronicon Ecclesiasticum*, v, 3, ed. J.B. Abelos and T. Lamy, Louvain 1877, col. 65; For the Christology of this synod, see W. Macomber, "The Christology of the Synod of Seleucia-Ctesiphon AD 486", *OCP* 24 (1958): 142-154. For Bar Šaumā, see S. Gerō, *Barsauma of Nisibis and Persian Christianity in the Fifth Century*, Lovanii/E. Peeters, 1981.

101. Labourt, *op. cit.*, p. 138, n. 1; Blockley, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

102. Erhart, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

103. *Ibid.*, p. 120.

treaty could encourage the Christians in the Sasanian lands to promote conversions. Thus, the Zoroastrian priests were trying to keep a balance in their conflict with the Christians.

The Sasanian king used the role and the interests of the Zoroastrian priesthood in accordance with the interests of Sasanian foreign policy at that particular time. Pirūz probably used the arguments about the refugees and the harassment of the Zoroastrians in the Roman land as a pretext to strengthen his claims on the most important issue of the Caspian Gates and the financial obligation, according to him, of the Romans. Undoubtedly, the state treasury of the Sasanians was not full after the continuous struggle against the threat of the Kidarites. It is also important that the financial issue is the striking one in the diplomatic struggle while the religious issues remain in the background.

Returning to the Armenian issue, in Balāsh's times (484-488), the determined efforts of the Zoroastrian priesthood to introduce and expand Zoroastrianism in the Armenian land had to cope with the resistance of the Armenians and the preference of the latter for the Christian religion. This effort that had started from the time of Yazdgird II<sup>95</sup> (449) caused the long term resistance of the Armenians, who, in spite of their defeat in Avarir (451), kept on operating a guerilla war against the Sasanian forces. The endeavor of the Zoroastrian priests to establish religious buildings (fire towers, etc.) and promote their rituals as a means to attract more Armenians to Zoroastrianism eventually proved to be ineffective. The thirty years Armenian resistance ended victoriously for the revolutionary struggle of Vahan Mamikonian in 487.<sup>96</sup> According to the treaty of that year, the Sasanians recognized Persarmenia as a Christian nation. Moreover, the fire temples would be eliminated from the region of Persarmenia.<sup>97</sup> What the Sasanians gained from this arrangement was the recognition of their sovereignty over Persarmenia. In particular, the local *marzbān* was removed from the region which came under the direct rule of the *shāhānshāh*.<sup>98</sup> It becomes clear that the religious policy of the Zoroastrian priesthood and the

95. Yazdgird made strong efforts to convert to Zoroastrianism the Christian Armenians, the Iberians and the Albanians. Greatrex, *Rome and Persia at War*, p. 45.

96. Grousset, *op. cit.*, p. 227.

97. Blockley, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

98. Christensen, *op. cit.*, p. 295. Frye, *op. cit.*, p. 149.

harassed and there was no issue concerning the Caspian Gates. After a tough diplomatic struggle between the two empires, Leo probably paid up, perhaps because he wanted to focus all his interest on the attack on the Vandals.<sup>91</sup>

Although not mentioned, the influence and the role of the Zoroastrian priesthood are evident in the demands of Pirūz. The passage of Priscus is long enough to show that the issue of the Zoroastrian communities was an important one in the agenda of the Sasanian side.<sup>92</sup> According to Sasanian claims, the Romans had prevented the Zoroastrians (*magi*) of their empire from following the traditional rituals of Zoroastrianism, like the use of fire in their temples.<sup>93</sup> The case of the Zoroastrian communities and their protection was always one of the first priorities of the policy of the Zoroastrian priesthood. However, it must be pointed out that the religious character of the Roman Zoroastrian communities was not identified with the character of Zoroastrianism in the Sasanian Empire. From the Hellenistic period onwards, the Zoroastrians of Asia Minor had retained their special rituals and creeds that differed from those of the Iranian geographical frame. It is highly unlikely that the Zoroastrians of the Roman Empire during the fifth century had been influenced by the Zoroastrian context of the Sasanian Empire.<sup>94</sup> The *mūbadān*, however, put aside this important detail since they considered the Zoroastrians of the Roman Empire as a vital part of the Zoroastrian religious context. The common links between the two different aspects of Zoroastrianism was the bond that enabled the Zoroastrian priesthood to establish its policy concerning these communities and promote itself as their protecting power. Moreover, the violation of the 422

91. Blockley, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

92. Priscus, 41.1.5.

93. Regarding the term "magi" in the Greek text, Blockley correctly points out that it is not clear whether by this term the followers of the Zoroastrian religion are meant or the priests of Zoroastrianism. It is very difficult indeed to define this term in such a general phrase and information context like that of Priscus' text. However, in this case this is not the point, since it seems reasonable that the Zoroastrian communities had their own priests in order to perform their official rituals and religious duties.

94. The ritual status of the Zoroastrians must have had several resemblances to those of Armenia in the 3rd cent. A.D. See M. L. Chaumont, *Recherches sur l'histoire d'Arménie de l'avènement des Sassanides à la conversion du Royaume*, Paris 1969, pp. 74-77. Since no political or religious change/influence from the Sasanian Zoroastrianism had taken place in the meantime, there is no reason to believe that the cultural context of the Roman Zoroastrians had changed or at least was near to that of the Zoroastrians of Sasanian Iran.



to interfere in this conflict, and in fact gave the Sasanians and the Zoroastrian priesthood the chance to suppress the Armenian resistance and go on with their pro-Zoroastrian policy in the region.<sup>86</sup> Indeed, at the battle of Avarir the resistance of the Armenians was crushed (451).

### III) The Second Half of the 5th Century

During Yazdgird II's reign, the Zoroastrian priesthood succeeded in promoting further the policy of persecutions against the Christians in Iran. While in Pirūz's reign (459-484) the previous policy concerning the religious minorities did not change and the promotion of the Zoroastrian interests in Armenia was not interrupted,<sup>87</sup> the Sasanian state had to cope with an unexpected problem, the drought and a seven year famine.<sup>88</sup> The difficult financial conditions in combination with the persecutions within the Sasanian state worsened the Christians' (Monophysites) status so much that they asked for asylum from the Romans. The Roman emperor Leo I decided that the Roman Empire should provide asylum to the refugees and he implemented this decision. However, this action had not been taken by his two predecessors (Theodosian II, Marcian), since it was against the terms of the 422 treaty.<sup>89</sup>

The Sasanian answer came from Pirūz who sent an embassy to Leo in 464 with a letter full of complaints: the Roman violation of the 422 treaty concerning the asylum, the harassment of the Zoroastrian communities in the Roman Empire,<sup>90</sup> and, of course, the financial case of the Caspian Gates. The Roman side denied all the accusations claiming that no asylum was given to any refugee, the Zoroastrian communities in the Roman Empire had not been

86. Elishē, p. 124.

87. Greatrex, *op. cit.*, pp. 46, 121.

88. Bīrūnī (Abū al-Raiḥān Muḥammad b. Aḥmad), *The Chronology of Ancient Nations*, ed. & tr. C.E. Sachau, London 1879, pp. 215f.; Tha'ālibī (Abū Mansūr), *Histoire des rois de Perse*, ed. & tr. H. Zotenberg, Paris 1900, pp. 275f.

89. Labourt, *op. cit.*, pp. 138-140.

90. The argument for the Zoroastrian communities in the Roman empire was used in an extensive way: "καὶ τῶν μάγων τῶν ἐν τῇ ῥωμαίων γῆ ἐκ παλαιῶν οἰκοῦντων χρόνων, ὡς ἀπάγειν αὐτοῖς τῶν πατρίων ἔθων καὶ νόμων... παρενοχλοῦσι τε ἑσασὶ καὶ ἀνακαίεσθαι κατὰ τὸν θεσμόν οὐ συγχωροῦσιν τὸ παρ' αὐτοῖς ἄσβεστον καλούμενον πῦρ." Moreover Firuz with his step was asking: "...μῆτε παρενοχλεῖσθαι τοὺς μάγους τῆς θρησκείας πέρι..." Priscus, Frag. 41.1.

the Christians, decided to compromise in part their pursuits, albeit reluctantly. The preservation of the Zoroastrian communities in Asia Minor as well as the expansion of Zoroastrianism were also important missions to be fulfilled.

Armenia, however, remained an area of intense heat for both the empires. In particular, the effort of the Sasanians to expand the Zoroastrian faith in Persarmenia had not stopped in the meantime. The *mūbadān* were in charge of this campaign and at this time they had one more indirect ally, the incursions of the Huns in the Roman territory. This threat forced the Romans to focus their military and political interest on the Balkans and made their eastern policy inactive.

Aware of this situation, Yazdgird II strongly promoted along with the Zoroastrian priests the policy of expansion of Zoroastrianism in Persarmenia.<sup>84</sup> The intensive character of the conversion plans put into practice by the *mūbadān* caused the revolt of the Armenians.<sup>85</sup> The Roman army was incapable of battling simultaneously on two fronts. Hence, Marcian sent an embassy to the Sasanian king stating that he did not intend

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mark the gradual change of the role of the Christians in the Sasanian Empire concerning the political game of the two empires. The formation of an official dogmatic and psychological gap of the two creeds of Christianity marked essentially the independent route of the Eastern Church without however breaking the loose bonds.

The Zoroastrian clergy might have been delighted with the decisions of the Christian Synod at Ephesus. The schism of the Christians in the Roman state into Orthodox and heretics had its effects for the Christian communities of Sasanian Iran. In late fifth century the competitive relations between the Orthodox and Nestorian subjects of the *shāhānshāh* would be a daily reality and an unexpected weapon in the hands of the priesthood in order to succeed in reducing the influence of the Christian element. During Anastasius' reign the cases of Christian internal conflicts are known through the hagiographic texts. Nestorians were the majority of the Christian folk and therefore more powerful. The magi with their judicial function were able to control the events by interfering in these conflicts, since most of the time one side or the other asked for the mediation of the *mūbadān* in their differences. See John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, ed. E.W. Brooks, Turnhout-Belgique 1974, pp. 142-143. The persecutions however towards the Orthodox party might have been more, since the Orthodox creed was officially recognized by the Roman state and, therefore, the clergy and *shāhānshāh* considered the Orthodox Christians of the Sasanian Empire as spies of the Roman emperor against them. See John of Ephesus, p. 144.

84. M. Chahin, *The Kingdom of Armenia*, New York 1987, p. 258; R. Grousset, *Histoire de l'Arménie*, Paris 1947, pp. 202-203.

85. G.P. Greatrex, *Rome and Persia at War, 502-532*, Leeds 1998, p. 124.

become the *Catholicos* there. However, his request was rejected.<sup>81</sup> The issue here is that there was a reaction from the natives of Armenia on this pro-Zoroastrian policy of the Sasanians in the region. It is obvious from the sequence of the events that the pro-Zoroastrian policy of Bahrām V was also applied in the case of Persarmenia. His action to depose the *Catholicos* and replace him with another person trusted by him was a part of his effort to expand Zoroastrianism in the area and restrict the Christian influence. The Zoroastrian priesthood benefited from this policy, a result of its own influence on the internal political scene of the empire. However, this influence could never have been fruitful if it had not been identified with the royal-political plans of the Sasanians.

#### b) The Treaty of 441

During Yazdgird II's reign (438-457) the relations of the two empires were mainly pacific since both of them had to cope simultaneously with several external enemies (Huns and Vandals for the Romans, Kidarites for the Sasanians). According to the treaty of 441, the terms of the previous treaty were renewed with the supplement of prohibiting the fortification of the frontier regions.<sup>82</sup>

As far as the pursuits of the priesthood are concerned, the preservation of the equal treatment of the two religious minorities from both sides was the essential conclusion of the new treaty. *Mūbadān* had realized that after almost half a century they had to compromise with the new reality. Their continuous effort to eliminate Christians, or at least reduce their influence and activity, and their transformation from an influential religious sect into a harmless one for the political and religious standards of the Sasanian Empire had failed. After a century of persecutions, Christianity, in the Sasanian state, had started gradually acquiring a new dogmatic status, Nestorianism. Christianity proved to be extremely resistant and gained its own place and role in the life of Iranians.<sup>83</sup> The Zoroastrian priests realizing that it was in vain to battle against

81. Blockley, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

82. Procopius, *De Bellis*, I. 2. 15.

83. The status of a part of the Christian communities began to change in a long term process after the condemnation of Nestorianism by the Third Council of Ephesus. See G. Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State*, tr. in Greek by I. Panagopoulos, Athens 1989, pp. 120-121. The schism of the Capital with a considerable part of Eastern Christianity would

term, however, it would protect the Christian communities of Iran because it would devalue the argument of the Zoroastrian priests that the Christians of Iran were spies of the Romans.

Returning to the content of the “100 years peace treaty” of 422, it undoubtedly had a strong religious character.<sup>78</sup> Through this treaty the Zoroastrian priests had a great opportunity to promote their pursuits as well as the power of the Zoroastrian religion. The events of the previous seven years must have been satisfactory for the *mūbadān*.<sup>79</sup> The rise of Bahrām V had justified their decision to support the latter king, since Yazdgird’s son identified his policy with that of the magi. He believed that the Zoroastrian religion was under attack by the Christian presence and activity and this situation had to change. At the same time, he knew that with the passing of time the authority of the king would begin to fade. He also knew that if he wanted to secure his position on the throne, he would have to keep friendly and peaceful relations with the other competitive powers of the society. His father’s example was still fresh in his memory. Bahrām V and the priesthood benefited from their struggle with the Roman Empire and the Christian threat. The cooperation between the monarchy and the priesthood was a reality that did not help the pursuits of the Romans. The struggle for survival and prevalence of Zoroastrianism would continue in the future.

The case of Armenia is a typical example of the influence of the Zoroastrian priesthood on the political events and foreign issues of the two empires. In 428, there was the simultaneous deposition of the last Arsacid ruler of Armenia, Ardashīr, and the removal of Sahak, the *Catholicos* of Armenia.<sup>80</sup> While the deposition of the political ruler did not cause severe reactions, the same did not happen with the case of the *Catholicos*. In 433, the *nakharars* of the area asked from Bahrām to restore Sahak to his position but the Sasanian king refused. Then Anatolius, the *magister militum per Orientem*, asked Bahrām to send Sahak to the Roman controlled area and

78. “Τότε γοῖν Πέρσαι... ἐκαντοῦται σπονδὰς πρὸς ῥωμαίους ἔθεντο”, Sozomenus IX. 4.1.

79. According to the treaty, there would be a period of peace for 100 years for the two empires but this term would be in practice only for 12 years after the treaty. See Synelle, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

80. Moses Khorenats'i, 3.64; Lazar of Pharbé, *Histoire arménienne*, tr. Pere Ghesarian, in V. Langlois, ed., *Collection des historiens anciens et modernes de l'Arménie* 2, Paris 1869, pp. 23-25.

Sasanian diplomacy, since its acceptance by the Roman side limited, although typically in part, the movements of the Christians within the borders of the Sasanian Empire. In a future conflict the Roman Empire was tied with the sign of this treatment not to provide again shelter to refugees coming from the Sasanian land.<sup>73</sup>

The pro-Zoroastrian policy of Bahrām V Gūr denoted the increasing influence of the Zoroastrian priesthood, and moreover, the ascension of an active anti-Christian policy from the *mūbadān*. The Sasanian authorities and the Zoroastrian priesthood were determined to ban any proselytizing action from the Christians in the Sasanian lands. The Persian *Catholicos* Dādīshō's double arrest and execution between 422 and 424 by the Zoroastrian-Sasanian authorities can be interpreted as the application of a hard line policy on behalf of the Zoroastrian priesthood to diminish the expansion of the Christians.<sup>74</sup> The *mūbadān* wanted to make the Christian threat evident to the Sasanian authorities in order to take more action. The usual accusations against Christians of being spies for Constantinople came up again. For the Sasanian king it was mostly a part of his political game against the regime of Constantinople. The political character of Dādīshō's case was revealed a few months later. The Christian clergy of the Sasanian state was pressed by the Zoroastrian priesthood and the Sasanian king to call a synod in order to forbid any intervention of the Western church in the Christian church of Sasanian Iran. That was exactly the result of the synod summoned in 424.<sup>75</sup> According to the decisions of this synod, no questions regarding the Christian church of the Sasanian Empire should be referred to the church of the Romans.<sup>76</sup> The result of this synod favored the goals of the Zoroastrian priesthood and the Sasanian king in the short term, since it promoted the prospect of gradual separation of the Persian and Roman churches and ensured the restriction of foreign interventions in the political scene of the empire.<sup>77</sup> In the long

73. Malchus, in *The Fragmentary Classicizing Historians of the Later Roman Empire*, Frag. 1.

74. For the death of Dadisho see Amr and Saliba, p. 17; Mari, p. 31; Michel le Syrien, 8.4.

75. Blockley, *op. cit.*, p. 59. For the decisions of the synod, see *Synodicon Orientale*, pp. 285-298.

76. *Synodicon Orientale*, p. 292.

77. Erhart, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

facing his own problems, the trouble in Persarmenia, a constantly troublesome region for the military generals of the Sasanian army.<sup>69</sup> The proposal for armistice from the person who had declared the war, Theodosius, was not unexpected to all those who were aware of the internal political scenes of both empires. Bahrām V accepted eagerly the Roman proposal for armistice considering that he was the one who would benefit by the short-term conflict with Constantinople. He had managed to transfer the military operations into Roman territory while at first he was in a defensive position. The acceptance of the armistice by the Sasanian side did not happen without a necessary exchange, a result of the tactical advantage of the Sasanians in the battlefields at that period.

The terms of the treaty were dictated mostly by the Sasanian side, mainly on the basis of the *status quo ante*. The only exception was the issue of the Caspian Gates.<sup>70</sup> The Sasanians accepted the Roman demand to stop the persecutions against the Christians but they asked in return the tolerance and respect of the religious rights of the Zoroastrian communities in Asia Minor.<sup>71</sup> As mentioned above, these rights had been violated in 414 and their protection was the basic presupposition for the respect of the Christian communities in the Sasanian Empire. However, with this term, the mutuality concerning the protection of the religious rights of the Zoroastrians in Asia Minor was secured.<sup>72</sup> Undoubtedly, this term was an important success for the interests and policy of the Zoroastrian priesthood concerning the protection of the Zoroastrian communities in the region. It was perhaps a pretext of the policy of expansion that the Zoroastrian authorities would follow for Zoroastrianism in the region of Armenia later (see below).

According to the second term of the treaty, both sides were responsible for the non-acceptance of refugees coming from the other empire. Particularly, the meaning of the term "refugee" is general and unspecified, but, according to the events that led the two empires into conflict, it must be seen for its strong religious character. This second term was a success of

69. Blockley, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

70. Tabarī, p. 116; Blockley, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

71. *Die Chronikon von Arbela*, ed. E. Sachau, Berlin 1915, 33 mentions that "both parties agreed to give their territories complete liberty in the matter of religion". Also see Labourt, *op. cit.*, p. 118; Holum, *Pulcheria*, p. 170.

72. Holum, *op. cit.*, pp. 170-171.

experience of the new Sasanian king.<sup>63</sup> This policy would cause the Roman-Sasanian military conflict in 421-422.<sup>64</sup>

The new persecutions brought new problems to the relations of the two empires. When the persecution began, a great number of Christians went as refugees to the Roman territory. One group went to Constantinople and addressed the Patriarch Atticus who then informed the emperor Theodosius. The Sasanian embassy that reached Constantinople demanded the surrender of the refugees but their demand met the denial of the Romans.<sup>65</sup> Several other hostilities took place afterwards that led to war.<sup>66</sup> The emperor Theodosius declared war against *shāhānshāh*, a war that would end in the next season (422).<sup>67</sup>

The short character of the military conflict of 421-422 was not unexpected considering the historical frame of this period. Theodosius understood that a wavering war with such a strong opponent, like the Sasanians, could only cause damage to the Roman Empire together with the threat of the Huns in Thrace.<sup>68</sup> On the other hand, Bahrām V Gūr was

63. The case of the wealthy Christian martyr Pirūz who became Zoroastrian after torture and then repented from his apostasy is well known: Mihrshāpūr, the Zoroastrian high priest, was in charge of this case and he asked the Sasanian king Bahrām V to sentence Pirūz to death because the Christians "did not obey the orders of the king, they did not worship the Zoroastrian gods, they had the same faith with the Roman Christians and in general they had formed a secret alliance with the Romans". It is important that the Zoroastrian priest advices Bahrām V in a political and religious way at the same time. He thinks that in case of a war between the two empires the Persian Christians are going to undermine and harm the *shāhānshāh*'s power. See Brock, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

64. The influence of the priests in these decisions was crucial. See Socrates, VIII, 18: "ὁ υἱὸς αὐτοῦ Βαραράνης ὄνομα, τὴν βασιλεία διαδεξάμενος, καὶ ὑπὸ τῶν μάγων ἀναπεισθεῖς, χαλεπῶς τοὺς χριστιανοὺς ἤλαυνε, τιμωρίας καὶ στρεβλὰς διαφοροὺς ἐπάγων αὐτοῖς." Bahrām, in contradiction to his father's policy, had the best relations with the clergy and the nobles. According to Tabarī, Bahrām accepted the suggestions of the clergy and the nobles and *mūbadānmūbad* brought the crown and the regalia and placed them on one side. See Tabarī, p. 91.

65. Socrates, VII, 18; Michel le Syrien, 8.4, p. 16.

66. Socrates, VII, 18; Michel le Syrien, 8.5, pp. 21f.

67. For the details of this war, see Synelle, *op. cit.*, pp. 52-55 and Holum, *Pulcheria*, p. 162.

68. Holum, *op. cit.*, pp. 168-169; *idem*, *Theodosian Empresses*, p. 121; Greatrex, "The Two Fifth Century Wars", p. 2.

The reasons that led to the assassination of Yazdgird I and his removal from the political life of Sasanian Iran are uncertain but they can probably be traced to the nobility and Zoroastrian priesthood. The Zoroastrian priests developed their own policy and strategies with the support of the nobility. The discontent of the *magi* with Yazdgird's favorable policy towards Christians was increased, especially after the effort of the Christians to convert members of the Sasanian nobility. They were also aware that there were political reasons behind the mild attitude of the Sasanian king and the limitations placed on the influence of the Zoroastrian priests and the nobility.<sup>60</sup> Yazdgird ambitiously thought that he could rule without the intervention of the priesthood and the nobility. The cost of this ambition would be his life.

### iii) The Conflicts of 421-422 and 441

#### a) 421-422

After Yazdgird's death the sociopolitical powers of the empire decided the enthronement of Yazdgird's son, Bahrām V Gūr (420-438). Bahrām was determined to pursue an aggressive policy against the Christians in contradiction to the conciliatory policy of his father.<sup>61</sup> In fact, after the reign of Yazdgird I, there was throughout the 5th century, a hard-line policy and a strong collaboration of all Sasanian kings and the Zoroastrian priesthood against the Christian and Jewish communities of the empire. Indeed, the new king justified the expectations of the nobility and the priesthood by pursuing a policy of persecutions against his Christian subjects.<sup>62</sup> The causes for these accusations were familiar: conversion activity and espionage on behalf of the Christians. The role of the Zoroastrian priesthood in this case was of vital importance since they promoted their religious policy by accusing the Christians of the previous activities and by taking advantage of the lack of

60. The circumstances under which Yazdgird's death took place are uncertain. The Islamic sources narrate an accidental death, that he was kicked by a horse. See Ṭabarī, p. 73. Also Ya'qūbī, p. 199. Blockley accepts Mari's (p. 29) and the *Chronicle de Séert's* (1.74) information that Yazdgird died from physical reasons (headache). See Blockley, *op. cit.*, p. 199, n. 25. For the more convincing theory of his assassination, see Th. Nöldeke, *Études sur l'histoire de la Perse*, trans. O. Wirth, Paris 1890, p. 158.

61. Holum, *Empresses*, p. 102.

62. Schrier, *op. cit.*, p. 79.



the reason was that what the priests were seeking appeared in 420. Particularly, the Christian priest Hashū at Hormizdardashīr destroyed a fire temple that was situated near a Christian one where he was in charge.<sup>55</sup> This action caused the wrath of the *mūbadān* and the Sasanian authorities in general. Yazdgird ordered his servants to bring Hashū and his bishop Abdā in front of him and he demanded that they reconstruct at their own expense the fire temple that had been destroyed earlier. Yazdgird's demand reflects his tolerant attitude towards the Christians. However, Abdā was irreconcilable and, as a consequence, he and his companion became martyrs.<sup>56</sup> The Zoroastrian priesthood put their plans into practice to persecute Christians and, according to Theophanes, many Christians were killed and many others fled to the Roman Empire.<sup>57</sup> In 419/420 *Catholicos* Yahballāhā, with the permission of Yazdgird I, convened a synod in Veh-Ardashīr in order to cope with the issue of the deteriorating religious condition in the Sasanian Empire but with no practical and long term results.<sup>58</sup> It is not clear whether it is Yazdgird I who decided on the strict measures to be taken against Christians, but his sudden and mysterious death did not allow him to implement the persecution policy against the Christians.<sup>59</sup>

55. Synelle, *op. cit.*, p. 57. The opinion of Synelle that Hashū probably destroyed the fire-temple at Hormuzardashīr influenced by the policy of Poulcheria in the Roman territories is not baseless. Moreover, it has to be pointed out that Hashū was aware of the religious and political conditions in the region where he lived and he acted this way without thinking of the possible consequences against him or other Christians. This strong feeling and thought might have been a result of the friendly policy of Yazdgird towards Christians until that moment. The action of Hashū must be interpreted considering the religious competition of the period as well as the free space of the Christian missionary efforts. This effort in accordance with the general situation denoted that the influence of the Zoroastrian clergy had been reduced.

56. A. Christensen, *L'Iran sous les Sassanides*, Copenhagen 1944, p. 272; Blockley, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

57. Theophanes, pp. 82-83.: "οἱ γὰρ μάγοι καὶ τὰς πόλεις καὶ κάμας ἐπιμελῶς ἐθήρευον τοὺς λανθάνοντας... ἀφειδῶς δὲ τῶν χριστιανῶν κτεινομένων πλεῖστοι καὶ ἐν αὐτοῖς τοῖς βασιλείοις ἀνηρέθησαν. Πολλοὶ δὲ καὶ τοῖς ῥωμαίοις προσέφυγον."

The stories of several martyrs such as Abdā, Zataq and the Ten Martyrs (Martyrs of Kirkuk) of that time give quite a clear picture of the role of the Zoroastrian priests in the process of their (Christian) persecutions. The usual dilemma that Christians were put under was either to accept the Zoroastrian faith and recognize the religious supremacy of the Sasanian king or choose death. See Van Rompay, *op. cit.*, pp. 369-375.

58. *Synodicon Orientale*, 37-42 (276-284); Van Rompay, *op. cit.*, pp. 363-364.

59. Concerning the arguments about the issue of the persecutions, see Christensen, *op. cit.*, p. 273; Schrier, *op. cit.*, p. 77 and Van Rompay, *op. cit.*, p. 364.

the Christians on many occasions despite the king's order. Yazdgird was not able to control completely every order of the *mūbadān* in every part of his land. Regardless, whether the Zoroastrian persecutions took place before or after Poulcheria's edict,<sup>52</sup> it is certain that the Zoroastrian priesthood took advantage of the Roman oppression against their Roman co-believers and strengthened their efforts to reverse the climate in the internal political and religious scene of the Sasanian Empire. The Roman oppression against the Zoroastrians must have been the first element that made Yazdgird feel uneasy. He realized that the proclaimed policy of mutual respect maintained in the previous years between the Zoroastrian and Christian communities in both empires was not adhered to any more by the Roman side. The change of policy by Constantinople exposed Yazdgird and his pro-Christian policy in his state. In 417/418, Yazdgird sent an envoy, the Persian *Catholicos* Yahballāhā to Constantinople in order to address the deterioration of relations between the two empires.<sup>53</sup> The continuation of the same policy by Yazdgird seemed purposeless and dangerous for his reign since he would soon face the severe reaction of the Zoroastrian priests and other political powers of his country.<sup>54</sup>

However, if Poulcheria's policy gave an opportunity for Yazdgird to change his policy towards his Christian subjects, the provocative attitude of some of the Christians would lead the Zoroastrian priests to take active measures against them. The prosperous climate after the Synod of 410 would not last for long and

52. Cedrenus (pp. 589-590) notes that these events took place in the 5th year of Theodosius' guardianship (413). However it must be noted that Cedrenus did not live near the period of time he narrates and therefore his chronology is not completely reliable.

53. *Synodicon Orientale*, 276f.; *Chronicle de Séert*, 1.71, pp. 327f.; *De patriarchis Nestorianorum commentaria*, Mari, p. 28; Michel le Syrien, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, tr. J.-B. Chabot, Paris 1902, 8.2. For the controversies of the sources, see the analysis of Blockley, *op. cit.*, p. 199, n. 19; also see O.J. Schrier, "Syriac Evidence for the Roman-Persian War of 421-422", *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 33 (1992): 76.

54. According to Van Rompay, the change of Yazdgird's religious policy resulted from the increasing Christian policy of conversions within the Sasanian Empire. These conversions caused the reaction of the Zoroastrian priests. See Van Rompay, *op. cit.*, p. 372. This argument is absolutely reasonable but it deals only with the case of the Christians within the Sasanian Empire and does not take into account the case of the Zoroastrians in the Roman Empire after Poulcheria's edict. A combination of both cases, the conditions of the Christian and Zoroastrian communities in the Sasanian and Roman Empires respectively, could explain in part the change of the religious policy of Yazdgird I towards the Christians of his empire.

Cedrenus' text is an important source pertaining to this "crisis". He writes that in 413, many Christians became martyrs and were put to death by the policy of the Zoroastrian priesthood.<sup>47</sup> This date is definitely premature in comparison to the well known persecutions of the last years of Yazdgird's reign or the first years of Bahrām's sovereignty (ca. 420-421). Perhaps it reflects a primary kind of persecution that preceded the later events or there is a strong possibility of an inaccurate estimation of the time of the events by Cedrenus.

At the same time (414) the political and religious situation in the Roman state had changed, when Augusta Poulcheria became the predominant person of the Roman political scene. A victorious imperial ideology, connected to the Christian religious context, gradually revived and urged the Roman authorities to adopt a different and more absolute approach towards both the internal and foreign affairs of the Empire.<sup>48</sup> In this context, the edicts against the Greeks and the Jews violated the meaning of religious independence in the Roman Empire.<sup>49</sup> The Zoroastrian communities of Asia Minor were one of the targets of the new Roman religious policy.<sup>50</sup> Although there was no official edict naming them, the nature of the Zoroastrian rituals resembled in many ways the Greek paganism, or at least the Christians were confused by this similarity. As a result, the Zoroastrians were persecuted as pagans by the Roman authorities during the second decade of the 5th century.<sup>51</sup>

Cedrenus' passage shows that the Zoroastrian priests had the power in the internal religious life of the Sasanian Empire to carry out persecutions against

47. Cedrenus, pp. 589-590. "Τούτῳ τῷ ἔτει πολλοὶ χριστιανοὶ ὑπὸ τῶν μάγων μάρτυρες γεγονόασιν..."

48. Holum, "Pulcheria", p. 153; *idem*, *Empresses*, pp. 103-107.

49. Blockley, *op. cit.*, p. 55; Holum, *op. cit.*, pp. 161-162. For the negative role of Poulcheria in the deterioration of the relations of the two empires, see G.P. Greatrex, "The Two Fifth Century Wars between Roma and Persia", *Florilegium* 12 (1993); 111-112.

50. A.D. Lee, *Information and Frontiers, Roman Foreign Relations in Late Antiquity*, Cambridge University Press 1993, p. 103.

51. Priscus, in *The Fragmentary Classicising Historians of the Later Roman Empire*, R.C. Blockley, ed., Ottawa 1983, Frag. 31: "καὶ τῶν Μάγων τῶν ἐν τῇ Ῥωμαίων γῆ ἐκ παλαιῶν οἰκοῦντων χρόνων, ὡς ἀπάγειν αὐτοὺς τῶν πατρίων ἔθων καὶ νόμων ἐθέλοντες...". This approach of the events is in contrast to the view of Sclier who believes that the Romans followed a crusade policy against the Sasanians because of the persecutions against the Christians of the Sasanian Empire some years later, in 418-420. See below.

inefficiency of the Zoroastrian priests to take active measures against them. It must be assumed that the efforts of the *mūbadān* to cooperate with the other powers of the society (aristocracy, and bureaucracy) never stopped during this period. The Zoroastrian priesthood saw with discontent the developing progress of the Christians but they could do nothing to change Yazdgird's policy. The argument that the Christians were allies of the Roman emperor did not have any validity anymore because the political relations between the two empires were harmonious. There were only two ways for the priests to change the reality: either to wait for the Christians to make a blunder which they could then use to persuade Yazdgird to change his policy, or to cooperate with the nobility to change the person on the Sasanian throne. Time would show that a combination of these two possibilities would take place.

As mentioned below, during the second decade of the fifth century there was increasing oppression of the Christian communities by the Zoroastrian authorities in the Sasanian states and in the sensitive area of Armenia while the Zoroastrian communities suffered similar persecutions in the Roman land. It is not certain where the crisis started from but it is certain that these events changed the positive climate between the two states.

Meanwhile, things became worse in Persarmenia. After the death (416) of Khusraw III who had previously raised tension between the two empires, Yazdgird crowned his son Shāpūr I, king of Persarmenia. This development was in accordance with the aims of the Zoroastrian priesthood, because, besides the political goal of Yazdgird to depose the Arsacid dynasty from Armenia and replace it with the Sasanian, the Sasanian emperor favored the policy of the expansion of the Zoroastrian religion in the Armenian land.<sup>45</sup> In the development of these events the role of the *mūbadān* was essential, especially concerning the oppression of Christians in Persarmenia. They were the main factor for the promotion of the Sasanian policy in Armenia and they took advantage of their role in order to promote Zoroastrianism and their goals in the region.<sup>46</sup> In this case the relations between the Sasanian king and the Zoroastrian priests were characterized by mutual harmony based on common goals.

45. Moses Khorenats'i, *History of the Armenians*, tr. R.W. Thompson, Cambridge Mass./London 1978, 3.55.

46. For the conflict of the Sasanian authorities and the *nakharars* of Persarmenia, see Moses Khorenats'i, 3.55. As for the encroachment of the Syriac clergy and Christianity, see E. Stein, *Histoire du bas-empire*, tr. J.R. Palanque, Paris 1959, vol. I, p. 280.

The priests had realized that the Sasanian monarch was not willing at all to allow their intervention in the decisions he was to make in the future. In fact Yazdgird aimed to control the nobility and restrict the Zoroastrian priesthood's influence.<sup>41</sup> The denial of Yazdgird I to accept the persecution policy of the priests concerning the treatment of the Christians created a non-bridging gap between the monarchy and the priesthood.<sup>42</sup> The strengthening of the Christian influence after the synod of 410 was now official and was based on the spirit of tolerance of *shāhānshāh*, a situation that left no other choices to the Zoroastrian priesthood. It was now urgent for them to try to change the political scene of the empire and cooperate with the nobility, since discontentment with Yazdgird's policy had created a negative climate for him in the internal political scene of the country.<sup>43</sup>

## ii) The Second Decade (410-419)

The decade after the synod of 410 was a period of rapid development for the Christian communities due to the tolerance of the Sasanian king<sup>44</sup> and the

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personality, his ability to mediate in every conflict and to undertake the reconciliation of the opponent sides. Especially after the reign of Bahrām V Gūr (421-439), the personality of Narseh became popular amongst the Zoroastrian clergy, since he was one of the supporters of the Zoroastrian policy against the Christian communities of the Sasanian Empire. So popular to the priesthood had Narseh been, that he was given the Mithraic surname Mihr (kind, perfect). See Ṭabarī, pp. 99, 103-106.

41. Yazdgird's policy to diminish the influence of his internal opponents included the cultivation of the support of several minorities such as the Jews and Christians, the promotion of his relations with his Arab allies of Hīra (Mundhīr III was entrusted with the mission to bring up Yazdgird's son, Bahrām V, away from the influence of the Persian aristocracy). See F. Decret, "Les consequence sur le christianisme en Perse de l'affrontement des empires romain et sassanide de Shapur I à Yezdegerd I", *Recherches Augustiniennes* 14(1979): 150-152.

42. The situation had to be changed and the clergy to be certain that the monarch would be their ally to protect the Zoroastrian creed. See R.N. Frye, "The Political History of Iran under the Sasanians", *CHI* 3/1: 134.

43. Due to the ambiguous historical designation of Yazdgird as guardian of Theodosius' son, Arcadius, Yazdgird's image in the Christian-Greek sources is positive. In fact he is presented to have been almost converted to Christianity. See Socrates VII. 8; Blockley, *op. cit.*, pp. 50-51.

On the contrary, Yazdgird is presented with the worst features concerning his behavior towards his subjects. According to Ṭabarī, Yazdgird was cruel, curt, suspicious and uninterested in other's opinion. See Ṭabarī, pp. 70-71. Ya'qūbī considers his reign "tyrannical". See Ya'qūbī, p. 199.

44. Blockley, *op. cit.*, pp. 54-55.

the permission of the *shāhānshāh*, the participants read a letter from the western bishops who condemned the opponents of Ishaq. The main program of the synod started on February 5th with the blessing of the Sasanian monarch.

According to the decisions of the synod: i) the church of the Sasanian Empire would adopt the dogma of Nicaea, ii) new roles would be created about the hierarchy of the church, iii) penalties for those who would not respect the decisions of the synod, iv) the *Catholicos* of Seleucia-Ctesiphon would be the head of the Christians of the Sasanian state.<sup>36</sup> The last phase of the workings were attended by two representatives of Yazdgird, who confirmed the agreement and decisions of the synod, recognized Ishaq's new position and at the same time offered state help to Mārūthā and Ishaq, in order to enable them to implement the decisions of the synod.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, the Christian prisoners who had been in jail due to their Christian faith would be released.<sup>38</sup> The *shāhānshāh*, who could ratify the choice of *Catholicos* and the bishops,<sup>39</sup> intervened in the internal affairs of the Christian church and did not stop there. He invited all the bishops to the palace and confirmed the full independence of the Christians concerning their religious rights and accepted the responsibility for the destruction of the Christian churches during the previous persecutions.

The state favored a more efficient control of the Christian church in a peaceful atmosphere in order to avoid any reactions. However, the *shāhānshāh* knew that the discontent of the priests was an important factor that had to be taken into consideration. Chief Minister Narseh would be one of the persons at that time who could contribute towards the maintenance of peaceful relations between Yazdgird I and the priesthood as well as the nobility.<sup>40</sup>

36. For the decisions of the synod, see *Synodicon Orientale, ou recueil de synods nestoriens*, tr. J.-B. Chabot, Paris 1902, pp. 254-275; The *Synodicon* is the most important source for the synods of the Eastern Church for the periods 410-775. Also see Labourt, *op. cit.*, pp. 94, 98; K.G. Holum, *Theodosian Empresses: Women and Imperial Dominion in Late Antiquity*, Berkeley 1977, p. 87.

37. Synelle, *op. cit.*, p. 52; Erhart, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

38. Bury, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

39. *Synodicon Orientale*, p. 255; N. Garsojan, "Secular Jurisdiction over the Armenian Church (Fourth to Seventh Centuries)", *Okeanos, Essays Presented to Ihor Sevcenko on his Sixtieth Birthday*, Cambridge Mass. 1984, p. 222.

40. The figure of Chief Minister (pahl. *Vozurg Framadhar* or ar. *wazīr al wuzarā' / ra'īs al ru'asā'*) Narseh dominates the political scene of the fifth century due to his strong

charges of the *mūbadān* against him.<sup>31</sup> This action of the Zoroastrian priests denoted the extent of their influence on the administrative system of the Sasanian state, although Yazdgird opposed the policy of the Zoroastrian priesthood. Yazdgird could not have any doubts about the claims of the *mūbadān* who had strong supporters in the nobility and bureaucracy as well as indisputable proofs in order to support their accusations.

However, the reaction came from the Roman Empire. The Romans worrying about these events sent Mārūthā again (Bishop of Maiferqat, Μαρτυρόπολις) to the court of Yazdgird, since the Christian bishop had maintained excellent relations with the Sasanian king (he was sent twice in the past as an ambassador to the Sasanian court).<sup>32</sup> Mārūthā was put in charge of the mission for the release of Ishaq and the negotiations with the Sasanian authorities, and especially the Zoroastrian priests. After long negotiations, it was decided to convoke a synod in 410 at Seleucia-Ctesiphon with the participation of all the Christian bishops of the Sasanian Empire. In the meantime (408-409) a new treaty was probably made that would last for one hundred years.<sup>33</sup> However this agreement was probably a reconfirmation of the agreement of 400 going back to the reconfirmation of the terms of the 363 and 387 agreements.

The synod of 410 was organized with the permission of Yazdgird I and, besides the religious element, it had a strong political character.<sup>34</sup> The political meaning of this synod is strengthened by the fact that the bishops were invited to participate through the royal mailing service. Forty bishops participated in the glorious opening on the Day of Epiphany in the great church of Seleucia.<sup>35</sup> During the first day, with

31. Labourt, *op. cit.*, pp. 91-92.

32. His first mission took place in 399 for the enthronement of Yazdgird I and the second one in 400 in order to announce the enthronement of the Roman emperor to the *shāhānshāh*. See Synelle, *op. cit.*, p. 51; Blockley, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

33. See Socrates, VII. 8; Sozomenus, IX. 4.

34. The Eastern Church had previously followed an independent stance regarding the policy of the Christian Church of the Later Roman Empire. From now on (410) the Persian Christians would depend doctrinally on the statements of the Roman church. In this context they accepted the creed of the council of Nicaea (325). See V. Erhart, "The Development of Syriac Christian Canon Law in the Sasanian Empire", in R.W. Mathisen, ed., *Law, Society and Authority in Late Antiquity*, Oxford 2000, p. 115; Also see Brock, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

35. At that time there were more than thirty bishoprics and six metropolitan sees. See Brock, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

The efforts of the Christians for the reorganization of their church led them to organize unofficial synods in order to authorize a young and vital person acceptable by everyone to direct the Christian Church. Ishaq was the new *Catholicos* (Καθολικός) who replaced Qayuma. The main reason for this effort of reconciliation and unification of the Christian church was Mārūthā (Μαρουθᾶς), a physician, diplomat and important political personality in the Roman Empire.<sup>27</sup> Mārūthā, who had taken part in the Roman mission led by Anthemius in 400, was the representative of the Roman emperor and the “Western” Church in Yazdgird’s court.<sup>28</sup> He tried to eliminate the dogmatic and administrative gap between the Western and Eastern bishops of Eastern Christianity in order to avoid the creation of a “national” Iranian Christian Church.<sup>29</sup> However the differences from both sides could not easily be resolved within a short time.

The Zoroastrian priests attended all these events in the Christian communities and the interference of *mūbadān* happened when the eastern part of the Christian clergy did not approve the election of Ishaq as *Catholicos*, because he was supported by the western side. Probably the Eastern clerics made false (?) accusations against Ishaq to the Zoroastrian authorities.<sup>30</sup> Ishaq really soon found himself in jail due to the official

27. The personality of Mārūthā was popular amongst the Christians of his time. The surnames “wise father and honorable leader”, “the ornament of our churches” and others reflect the importance of this man for the Iranian Christianity. See Asmussen, *op. cit.*, pp. 939-940. At the same time, his diplomatic experience as a link between Theodosius II and Yazdgird I made him irreplaceable. His medical knowledge was an advantage for him, since by healing Yazdgird’s son and the Sasanian emperor from a chronic headache, he contributed to the improvement of the relations between the two empires. See *De patriarchis Nestorianorum commentaria*, Mari, 28-29; Blockley, *op. cit.*, p. 49 and n. 31.

28. Socrates, *op. cit.*, VII, 8; Blockley, *op. cit.*, p. 196, ft. 19.

29. This effort was not a result of a kind of a “national” feeling of the Iranian Christians. On the contrary, it was due to the different thought and perception of the populations in the Fertile Crescent about the divine element from the prehistoric era. In the case of the nature of Jesus Christ, this ancient religious tradition was the base of the Nestorian and many other creeds of Eastern Christianity in contradiction with the ancient Greek basis of the Orthodox Christological approach. See Waterfield, *op. cit.*, pp. 21-22; See also Brock, *op. cit.*, pp. 18-19.

30. The aim of these actions was the overthrow of the ecclesiastical administration by Ishaq. See J.B. Bury, *The Later Roman Empire, from the Death of Theodosius to the Death of Justinian*, New York 1958, v. II, p. 6.



embassy led possibly by the *comes sacrarum largitionum* Anthemius and they achieved relief for the Christians of the Sasanian territory while Yazdgird probably achieved an agreement that restricted international trade to the cities of Nisibis, Callinicum and Artaxata (=Dvin).<sup>23</sup> It is obvious from these events that the religious dispute was a secondary but essential factor for Yazdgird in order to promote his political aspirations towards the Romans. The role of the Zoroastrian priests at this point must have been vital for the political plans of Yazdgird, since they probably undertook the task of the persecutions or oppression.

The former excellent relations of the Sasanian monarchy and the priesthood would be harmed, when Yazdgird I decided to adopt the enterprising, till then, policy of the approach towards the Christian communities. He was aware that the only way to preserve harmonic relations with the Roman emperor was the creation of a good atmosphere in his relations with Christians.<sup>24</sup> The Sasanian king had probably come to this conclusion due to the events of the 4th century, when the continuous persecutions of Shāpūr II did not have desirable results for the monarch and the priesthood. On the contrary, the Christians managed to adjust themselves into the new circumstances in order to survive and keep the integrity of their communities in the Sasanian Empire.<sup>25</sup> Yazdgird's plans were soon put into practice and the internal conflicts of the Christians helped him in this direction.<sup>26</sup>

23. This restriction was included in the Codex Iustinianus (4.63.4) dated to 408/409.

24. The political relations between the Sasanians and Romans were peaceful due to the policies of Yazdgird I (399-420) and Arcadius (395-408). Cedrenus Georgius, *Historiarum Compendium*, ed. E. Bekker, Bonnæ 1838, p. 586.

In this context, not only did the Sasanian king practice a policy of religious tolerance towards the Christians but he also favored the Christian communities of his empire in several ways. For example, he gave in honor of Mārūthā an inscribed gold cup filled with gold when the latter tried to establish Martyropolis as a sacred centre of Christianity. See E.K. Fowden, *The Barbarian Plain: Saint Sergius Between Rome and Iran*, Berkeley 1997, p. 56

25. During the last years of the 4th century, the Christian church enjoyed a period of reorganization after the persecutions of the previous years. See R. Waterfield, *Christians in Persia*, London 1973, p. 20; L. van Rompay, "Impetuous Martyrs? The Situation of the Persian Christians in the Last Years of Yazdgird I (419-420)", in M. Lamboigts and P. van Deun, eds., *Martyrium in Multidisciplinary Perspective*, Memorial Louis Reekmans, Leuven 1995, p. 363.

26. Waterfield, *op. cit.*, p. 20-21; J.P. Asmussen, "Christians in Iran", *CHI* 3/2: 940.

good relations of the priests with the Sasanian house, especially with the *shāhānshāh*, were always of great importance for the priesthood. Their relations were usually harmonic and their goals were mutual. However, the Zoroastrian priesthood this time realized that they were losing the cooperation of the king in their plans for the diminution of the Christian influence. The new political status quo did not keep up with the pursuits of the magi and there was only one way for them, the change of the internal political scene, at the moment that Yazdgird was seeking good relations with the Roman Empire through his benevolent attitude towards his Christian subjects.<sup>19</sup>

## II. The First Half of the 5th Cent.

### i) Yazdgird's Intervention in the Internal Issues of the Christian Communities and his Policy towards them

When Yazdgird I ascended the throne (A.D. 399), he was determined to change the peaceful relations of the two empires and the relations consequently took a turn for the worse. The thirty year period of the treaty of Nisibis (363) had passed<sup>20</sup> and now Yazdgird had the legal right to raise any dispute. According to his orders (about A.D. 399/400), the Christian communities were possibly harassed at that time, although it is not clear in the sources whether there were persecutions or threats.<sup>21</sup> However, the real aims of the Sasanian emperor were more financial-fiscal and less religious. Without underestimating the religious dispute at that time, it must be pointed out that Yazdgird aimed to give an answer to the Romans who had violated the trade monopoly of the Sasanians in Nisibis, a monopoly probably dictated by the treaty of 363.<sup>22</sup> In 400, or later, the Romans sent an

19. K. Synelle, *"Hoi diplomatikes skheseis Byzantiou kai Persias heos ton st'aiona*, Athens 1986, pp. 50-51. Yazdgird had been also "epitropos" of Arcadius' son, the young emperor Theodosius. See N. Garsoian, "Byzantium and the Sasanians", *CHI* 3/1: 578.

20. E. Chrysos, "Some Aspects of Roman-Persian Legal Relations", *Kleronomia* 8 (1976): 44. It is possible that a renewal was made in 393. See R.C. Blockley, *East Roman Foreign Policy*, Leeds 1992, p. 195, fl. 11.

21. *Chronicle de Séert*, publ. par Addai Scher, tr. par Abbé P. Dib. 1.1 PO 4, 1.66, p. 317; Mari, Maris, Amri et Slibae, *De patriarchis Nestoriarum commentaria*, ed. & tr. H. Gismondi, 2 vols., Rome (1896-1899) - (vol. 2.1 Mari's translation, vol. 2.2 translated by Amr and Sliba), Amr and Sliba, 13-14.

22. Blockley, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

The fifth century was a period of mainly peaceful relations between the two empires, except for the military conflicts of 420-422 and 440-441. Their main policy was the preservation of their border's *status-quo*, a policy resulting from the principle of mutual self-respect and recognition of each other as the most powerful states.<sup>17</sup> However, the same situation is not found in the Sasanian soil that had suffered from internal conflicts between the Christian, Zoroastrian and Jewish communities. The result of this opposition was the adoption of a hard line in the religious policy of the Sasanian king and the magi against the Christians. The accordance, however, in the relations of the king and the priesthood would not go on forever. The different aims of the Sasanian monarch and the religious leaders would not continue to stay hidden in moments of religious crisis.

The reign of Yazdgird I in the first two decades of the 5th century caused many conflicts in the Sasanian Empire. The Zoroastrian priests understood that the new *shāhānshāh* would put in practice the policy of protection of the rights of the Christian communities in order to counterbalance the increasing influence of the *mūbadān*.<sup>18</sup> Yazdgird's policy was in contradiction to the political attitude of the former Sasanians and this policy was not accepted by the priests. The

17. E. Chrysos, "Byzantium and Diplomacy at Work", in *Convegno internazionale sul tema La Persia e Bisanzio* (October 14-18, 2002, Rome), organized by the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, Istituto Italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente. I am indebted to professor Chrysos for his unpublished paper.

18. There is a difference between Christian and Islamic sources about the presentation of Yazdgird's I character. The Christian sources praise the Sasanian King for his positive attitude towards the Christian communities of his reign. See Socrates, *Ekklesiastike Historia*, v. I-III, ed. R. Hussey, Hildesheim, Georg Olms-Verlag, New York 1992, VII, H: "τοῦ δὴ βασιλέως Περσῶν Ἰσδιγέρδου, ὃς τοὺς ἐκεῖ Χριστιανοὺς οὐδαμῶς ἐδίωκε...". Procopii, *De Bellis*, ed. J. Haury - G. Wirth, v. I-IV, Lipsiae 1964, I, 2, 8 and Agathias, Δ, 25, 7 have the same attitude with Socrates. Theophanes, *Chronographia*, ed. Webber, Bonn 1832, p. 82 also notes that Yazdgird was almost baptized and his policy was against the Magi: "θεοσεβῆς γέγονεν, ὥστε ἐμελλε σχεδὸν βαπτίζεσθαι... καὶ τοὺς μάγους ὡς ἀπατεώνας ἐκόλαζεν". Obviously Theophanes' aspect reflects the Christian point of view.

On the contrary, the Islamic tradition presents Yazdgird with the worst image. Yazdgird I, due to his favorable policy towards Christians at the beginning of his reign, was given the surname "al-athīm" (=sinful). See Ṭabarī, p. 70; Ya'qūbī (Abū al-'Abbās Ahmad b. Ishāq), *Ta'rikh*, tr. M. Ibrahim Ayati, Tehran 1342/1921, p. 68. Also see K.G. Holum, "Pulcheria's Crusade and the Ideology of the Imperial Victory", *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 18 (1977): 155.

However, Constantine's Edict (313) and politico-religious action had its repercussions on Christians beyond the Roman borders. The existence of a strong and simultaneously numerous Christian minority near the western borders of the Sasanian state was a reason for political instability and a concern for the Sasanian authorities. The previously persecuted Christianity (*krestyānē*) had become a powerful religion that could influence the political scene both internally and in the foreign relations of the Roman state. The conflict of the Zoroastrian priests with the Christian subjects (*naṣrāyē*) of the *shāhānshāh* would be the main theme in the political and diplomatic struggle in the next centuries.<sup>14</sup>

The functions and nature of the Zoroastrian clergy of the previous centuries were basically preserved throughout the fifth century. However, there was a major change in the relationship of clergy and state in the Sasanian Empire in the fourth century and that was the promotion of Zoroastrianism in the level of the State Religion, a response to the religious-political development in the *Imperium Romanum*. It was during Shāpūr II's reign (309-379 A.D.) that the *mūbadān* became officially the intimate partners of the Sasanian king.<sup>15</sup> The alliance between the Sasanian monarchy and the Zoroastrian clergy was also pursued throughout the fifth century with the short interval of the reign of Yazdgird I (399-420 A.D.). The presence and role of the Zoroastrian clergy in the daily life of the Iranians and especially the political life was catalytic. They were the undisputable masters of the script and they were able to influence even the concept of the Iranians for their past.<sup>16</sup> Hence, this is the background through which someone must approach and interpret the influential role of the Zoroastrian priests in the political scene of the Sasanian state in the fifth century.

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ἐπιμιξίας, ὡς εἰκός, τοῖς αὐτόθι θείοις ἀνδράσιν ὠμίλησαν καὶ τῆς αὐτῶν ἀρετῆς ἐπειράθησαν". Sozomenus, *Ekklesiastike Historia* (Kirchengeschichte), ed. J.B. Bidez · G. Ch. Hansen, Berlin 1960, II 8, 2. Moreover, see A.J. Labourt, *Le Christianisme dans l'Empire Perse sous la dynastie Sassanide*, Paris 1904, p. 18; S.P. Brock, "Christians in the Sasanian Empire: A Case of Divided Loyalties", *Studies in Church History* 18 (1982): 7.

14. W. Hage, "Die Oströmische Staatskirche und die Christenheit des Perserreiches", *ZKG* 84 (1973): 174-187; Brock, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

15. J. Duchesne-Guillemin, "Zoroastrian Religion", *The Cambridge History of Iran (CHI)* 3/2: 886-888.

16. Shahbazi, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

trials of several crimes.<sup>9</sup> In other cases the priests are specialized in medicine which is usually connected to the knowledge of astronomy. Another important function of the Zoroastrian priests was the memorizing of religious texts while the scribes aimed to write down accounts of several religious oral traditions as well as the writing of religious texts with content relating to the dogmatic and ritual rules of the Zoroastrian religion.<sup>10</sup> This function has to be considered as the most important for historical research, since thanks to these scribes many details about the Sasanian and Zoroastrian past were written down in these Pahlavi texts. The multiple character of the duties denotes the important role the priests played in the day-to-day life of the society at that time and explains in part the political impact of the *mūbadān*.<sup>11</sup>

In order to understand the role of the Zoroastrian clergy in the political affairs of the Sasanian Empire with the Romans in the fifth century it is necessary to refer shortly to the Christian factor up to the fifth century. During the first decades of the Sasanian rule Christians stayed out of the political conflict of the two empires. They could enjoy the freedom of carrying out their rituals undisturbed and had the chance to spread their religion rapidly.<sup>12</sup> The power of the Christian communities was concentrated in the areas of Adiabēnē and its capital Arbēla (Irbil). Osrhoēnē with its capital Edessa (Urrhai), one of the first centers of Christianity in Western Asia, was in the Roman territory near the frontiers with the Sasanians and it had a great impact on the Christians of the Sasanian Empire.<sup>13</sup>

9. The hagiographic sources provide valuable material about the judicial duties of the clergy in the reign of Shāpūr I (309-379). In the *Vīos tes Osias Ias*, II, P.O. p. 464, the Magi undertake to carry out her examination, trial and sentence: "... Σαβώριος ... πρὸς ἐξέτασιν τοῖς μάγοις ἐκδίδωσι τὴν ἀγίαν. Οὗτοι γὰρ τὸ τηνικάδε ἐτάζειν καὶ ἐξετάζειν τὴν ἐξουσίαν εἰλήφεσαν πρὸς τοῦ Σαβωρίου."

10. M. Boyce, "Zoroaster the Priest", *BSOAS* 33 (1970): 22.

11. Agathias B 26, 5: "... νῦν δὲ τιμῶσιν αὐτοῦς ἅπαντες καὶ ὑπεράγονται...". Moreover, the participation of the High Priest in the second advisory council of *shāhānshāh* denotes the intensive political role of the Zoroastrian priesthood concerning the decisions on important issues of the empire.

12. The development of the Christian communities in new founded cities, like Ardashīr-khvarreh, helped the spreading of the Christian teaching. See M.L. Chaumont, "Les Sassanides et la christianisation de l'Empire iranien au IIIe. siècle de notre ère", *RHR* 165-166 (1964): 187. Moreover, the persecutions of the Roman authorities against the Christians of the Roman State had made the Sasanian King to maintain a friendly attitude towards the enemies of Romans.

13. Sozomenus is referred to those regions and the expansion of Christianity: "...καὶ Περσῶν δὲ χριστιανίσει τὴν ἀρχὴν ἡγοῦμαι, ὅσοι προφάσει τῶν Ὀσροηνῶν καὶ Ἀρμενίων

holding of the Divine Charisma (Kwarrenax) by the Sasanian monarch was the most fundamental condition to have the right to reign<sup>4</sup> and *mūbadānmūbad* often took part in the investiture of *shāhānshāh*.<sup>5</sup> The depiction of fire altars on the reverse of the Sasanian coins of every monarch but mainly the adoption of the religious symbols of several deities of the Zoroastrian pantheon in the crowns of the Sasanian dynasty made clear the content of the Sasanian ideology.<sup>6</sup> The priesthood through its daily contact with its folk was the best link for the King with his subjects.

It is known that there were a number of offices and titles that denoted the neuralgic position of the priests. The majority of the priesthood was entitled *mgwš* and was charged with the largest percentage of religious duties. The *magbād* and the *'twršpt* (=Lord of fire) were in charge of the supervision of the fire temples and their rituals while the duties of *bagnabat* were mainly to do with the temples of worship.<sup>7</sup> Apart from these, there were special positions with duties in the fields of finance<sup>8</sup> as well as justice, undertaking the inquiry and

4. About the depiction of Kwarrenax on the coins and the rock-reliefs of the Sasanian period see M. Alinia-Mozdoor, *The Depiction of the Sasanian Monarchical Ideology on the Crowns of the Sasanian Monarchy*, University of Ioannina 2001, (In Greek – Unpublished Doctorate), pp. 60-68.

5. On the rock-reliefs *shāhānshāh* receives the holy circle from Ahurā Mazdā or Anāhitā. However, it must be pointed out that there is no evidence that *mūbadānmūbad* took part in the investiture scenes before the reign of Bāhrām V Gūr (521-554). See G. Hermann, "The Sculptures of Bahram II", *JRAS* 1-2 (1970): 165-171.

6. The Zoroastrian fire altars on the depictions of the coinage are either based on a three-footed construction or their basement has a semi-column shape. See R. Göbl, *Sassanidische Numismatik*, Braunschweig 1968, Tab. 1, 2; M. Mochiri, *Étude de Numismatique Iranienne*, Tehran 1977, Fig. 1394. Concerning the religious symbols on the Sasanian crowns in order to express the Sasanian monarchical ideology see Alinia-Mozdoor, *op. cit.*, pp. 106ff.

7. M. Boyce, *Zoroastrians, Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*, London 1985, pp. 97-98.

8. The seals of the Sasanian era illuminates the activities referred to above, since there are inscriptions with the name of the city (e.g. cwxx, tr. Kuhak), the formula *mgwx* [tr. Magu kh(uda)] and the wider region, *wym'nwdy* (tr. Nihavand) and several other kinds of sentences like "*pl'dpn'h Y mgw' Ywyhy'n*" (Fray-panah, the magus, son of Veh). R. Gyselen, "Empreintes des Sceaux Sassanides", *Studia Iranica* 93 (1992): 53.

The role of the Zoroastrian priesthood in the financial life was catalytic because the spiritual and moral character of the priests was a guarantee for the carrying out of the financial activities: "... καὶ οὐδὲν αἰοῦν παρὰ Πέρσαις δόξειεν εὐνομον τε εἶναι καὶ δίκαιον, ὄγε μὴ ὑπὸ μάγου ἐμπεδοθείη", Agathias, *Agathiae Myrinaei Historiorum Libri Quinque*, rec. R. Keydell (CFHB), Berlin 1967, B 26, 5.

fundamental factor for the rise and preservation of the Sasanian dynasty on the throne gave the Zoroastrian priests the power and influence they were looking for at that period.<sup>2</sup> The origin and social status of the house of Ardashīr I justify the strong religious character of the Sasanian monarchical ideology.<sup>3</sup> The fact that the Sasanian house was directly connected to the Zoroastrian priesthood and that the place of its origin was the territory of Fārs and its capital Ištakhr, one of the most important Zoroastrian centers, would be an important factor for the strengthening of the Zoroastrian religion, and its priests, to such degree that it would become the official religion of the Sasanian Empire.

Besides the historical justification of the Sasanian rule over the Iranians, the Zoroastrian religion and priests provided the necessary cover for the interpretation of the divine character of *shāhānshāh* and his rule. The Sasanian monarchical ideology was based to a great extent on religion, since the royal authority was dependent on divine favor and protection. The

*International Journal of Ancient Iranian Studies* 1/1 (2001): 69-70; T. Daryaei, "National History or Keyanid History: The Nature of Sasanid Zoroastrian Historiography", *Iranian Studies* 28/3-4 (1995): 129-141; *idem*, "Memory and History: The Construction of the Past in Late Antique Persia", *Nāme-ye Irān-e Bāstān, The International Journal of Ancient Iranian Studies* 1/2 (2001): 11, 13-14.

2. The Sasanians "ruled their empire with the religion of the magi and fought against all those who did not want to be a member of this religion". Elishē, *History of Vardan and the Armenian War*, tr. & com. R.W. Thompson, Harvard University Press 1982, p. 60. The didactic words ascribed to Ardashīr I toward his son Shāpūr I that "the monarchy and religion are intimately connected and the one is of the other's need", and that "the essential part of the monarchy is the religion that protects monarchy" are noteworthy for the concept that the early Muslim scholars had about the relationship between kingship and religion in Sasanian Iran. In spite of the late date of this particular source, the concept of the close partnership between state and clergy in the early Sasanian period must not be considered an anachronism. See Mas'ūdī (Abū al-Hasan 'Alī b. al-Husain), *Murūj al-dhahab wa-ma'ādin al-jawhar*, tr. A. Payandeh, Tehran 1344/1923, p. 242.

3. The pro-Zoroastrian attitude of Ardashīr I created for him a good reputation in the Zoroastrian texts. See *Bundahīshn-i Hendī*, ed. R. Bihzadi, Tehran 1368/1987, p. 121. The connection of the Sasanians with the religious life was based on the family tradition, since Ardashīr's grandfather, Sasan, was a priest at the temple of Anāhitā at Ištakhr. Also Ardashīr was from the village Tīrūdih of Khīr region in the territory of Fārs, an exceptional center of the politic and religious life. See Tabarī (Muḥammad b. Jarīr), *Ta'rikh 'l rusul wa'l mulūk* (History of the Prophets and the Kings), tr. & ed. C.E. Bosworth, (Bibliotheca Persica) New York 1999, pp. 3-4.

seen in the internal religious-political struggle of the Zoroastrian priesthood with the Christians and the political powers of the Sasanian Empire. The Sasanian-Roman warfare during the fifth century is closely related to this internal religious struggle in the Sasanian Empire and at this point the role of the Zoroastrian priesthood was vital and strongly related to the foreign relations of the two empires.

The aims of this paper are to examine Sasanian-Roman foreign relations with respect to the socio-political and religious circumstances of the Sasanian Empire. Another aim is the interpretation of the tolerant policy of Yazdgird I towards Christians as a reflection of his policy of preserving friendly relations with the Romans. It also points out the concept of mutuality that was established in the second decade of the fifth century (414-422) concerning the treatment of the Christian and Zoroastrian communities in both empires during the same period. These are examined in a historical framework and in direct connection with the role of the Zoroastrian priesthood who are at the center of the present analysis.

### **The Political, Social and Religious Background of the Sasanian Empire**

The impact of the priests on the foreign affairs of the Sasanian state was a result of several significant factors; the importance of the Zoroastrian religion for the Sasanian monarchical ideology in combination with the priesthood's religious functions in the daily life of the Zoroastrians, as well as the establishment and growth of the Christian religion in the Sasanian Empire.

As far as the connection of the Zoroastrian religion and the Sasanian ideology is concerned, the Sasanians (224/226) declared their ideological connection – return to the glorious pre-Alexandrian past of Iran and their dynastic relation with the Kayanids, the Achaemenids of the Graeco-Roman historiographic tradition.<sup>1</sup> The importance of the religious element as a

1. The question of whether or not the Sasanians had preserved any memory of the Achaemenids has not been thoroughly answered so far. In spite of the well-documented research of Yarshater ("Were the Sasanians Heirs to the Achaemenids?", *La Persia nel Medioevo*, Rome 1971, pp. 17-31) who strengthens Nöldeke's theory (*Geschichte der Perser und Araber zur Zeit der Sasaniden*, Leiden 1879, p. 3) that the Sasanians did not have any memory has been, the opposite opinion seems stronger. The Achaemenids, at least some of them, were known through the Avestan historiographic tradition with the legendary name of the Kayanids. See A.Sh. Shahbazi, "Early Sasanians' Claim to Achaemenid Heritage", *Nāme-ye Irān-e Bāstān, The*