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The Reign of Bahrām V Gōr: The Revitalization of the Empire through Mounted Archery

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1. The Sources and Methodology

The sources for the Sasanians are plentiful and varied, but unfortunately all too often very difficult to use. The Roman sources are naturally very prejudiced towards their eastern foes. The Armenian and Georgian sources are all too often overlooked thanks to the plentiful mistakes these make in the dating of the reigns and events. It is very unfortunate that we no longer possess the official history of the Sasanian Empire, but fortunately fragments of it are extant in later Arabic and Iranian sources, and in legendary form in Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*. The principal problem with these texts is that the extant accounts include so much of so-called legendary material that it is difficult to separate fact from fiction.

The standard solution to the problem of unreliability of the sources among the *Classicists*¹ has been to dismiss practically all of the information provided by such sources, but this will not do. This approach is a travesty of our trade. It values on our own modern subjective views higher than the actual evidence provided by the period sources. To take an example from the field of modern espionage, if some intelligence operative would learn from an unreliable source that the terrorists are about to launch an attack should the operative in question ignore this piece of information just because the source is considered unreliable? It is the same with the study of history. If there are no overwhelmingly pressing reasons to dismiss the evidence such as for example some highly improbable supernatural phenomenon, the historian should give the source his benefit of doubt. It is the historian's job to analyze the relative reliability of the evidence at hand and not dismiss all extant evidence (not even the supernatural phenomena as these to need to be analyzed rationally) just because the source is considered unreliable. In the case of ancient and medieval history this would simply result in the dismissal of practically all extant narrative evidence in favor of one's own subjective opinion of how it must have been!

On top of this the *Classicists* have not even followed up their own faulty approach towards all available narrative sources, but have adopted a racist attitude. The standard

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¹ Please note that I have also received a Classical education and what I am writing here is meant to serve as a criticism of the way how we *Classicists* and *Medievalists* conduct our research. This is a follow-up of my previous criticism presented in my Doctoral Dissertation SYVÄNNE (2004) and subsequent articles and monographs.

practice among the *Classicists* is to consider the sources (in particular the pagan sources) in the Classical tradition to be superior over the Christian chronicles and “foreign” sources. The average *Classicist* does accept that the Classical sources include invented speeches and fake omens and attempt to analyze the information contained therein by taking these matters into account, but he/she does not similarly accept that the Christian miracle stories or the Middle Eastern heroic legends could contain similarly valuable evidence. This approach does not stand a closer scrutiny. One should subject all sources to the same standards of analysis and not dismiss those that do not belong to the classical tradition just because one has been trained as a *Classicist*. One just has to take into account the “peculiarities” of each class of sources and then analyze those on their own terms.

It is also all too common for the *Classicists* and also for *Medievalists* to dismiss all evidence presented by a source if it includes any elements of supernatural or supposedly legendary material. In its most common form the latter means prejudiced attitude towards the manly feats of arms which are then dismissed as legends. This sort of biased view does not take into account the importance of these manly feats for the warrior societies. These were the kind of things that the warrior societies considered particularly worthy of being put on record. The weirdest part of this approach is that the very same historians are quite often ready to accept the same stories if these are recorded by a historian following the classical tradition. This means that these historians are quite ready to accept for example Procopius’s descriptions of single combats as accurate, as they should be, but not the descriptions of single combats or hunting scenes in Armenian or Iranian sources. The dismissal of the value of the former sources in their entirety on the basis that those include supernatural elements is even sillier and very strange when the same historians are quite prepared to use the pagan classical sources without the blink of an eye. This approach fails to take into account the way in which the church historians, bishops, clerics etc. were expected to write. It is the same as one would claim that the Bible cannot be used as evidence of the history of the Jewish people because it includes supernatural elements or that Jesus Christ cannot have existed because the New Testament is full of supernatural elements.²

The following account of the reign of Bahrām is based on my interpretation of the information provided mainly by Tabari, Ferdowsi, Moses of Khorensatsi, Georgian Chronicles (henceforth GC), Procopius, and Socrates/Sokrates, but other sources have also been used. Most of these have been conveniently collected in REF2. I will specify the exact source in the footnote or text only in such cases where I propose something that is not generally accepted or is otherwise potentially controversial. In addition to these I have also used a number of ancient military treatises because these shed light on the way in which the different nations and empires fought. These include Maurice’s Strategikon and the Persian military treatises Ayin-nameh (a fragment in Ibn Qutaiba) as well as other remnants of Persian military treatises in later Muslim manuals. For further details and bibliographical

² This is a quote from my forthcoming preface to a monograph of mine. This preface includes a considerably longer analysis of the methodological tools and mistakes than is possible here. However, I may include the preface in question as an advertisement on my academia.edu website if the publisher accepts this.

information, see my *The Age of Hippotoxotai* as well as my other publications. My use of these military treatises is based on these earlier studies of mine and the reader is advised to consult these for additional information regarding the different military systems.

As is the case with any historical research my interpretation builds upon the work of others. These others include such eminent historians in no particular order as A. Christensen, T. Daryaee, K. Farrokh, A. Karbowska, E. Kettenhofen, P. Pourshariati, I. Shahid, A.D.H. Bivar, and R.W Thomson. I mention these in the text or notes only when I have specifically used those as a source for a particular piece of information. I have also broken the tradition of including a running commentary of the various different views adopted by different historians. I consider this to be one of the *topoi* used by modern historians to please the researchers named in the footnotes and not necessary for the topic. Everyone likes to see one's own name mentioned, but I break with this tradition purposefully. This is a study of Bahrām and not a study of the modern studies of Bahrām.

2. The Background: the Détente between East Rome and Persia ca. 402-420

The early fifth century was marked up by a period of détente between East Rome and Persia. This was a result of the foresight of two remarkable rulers *augustus* Arcadius (395-408) and *Šāhānšāh* Yazdgerd I (ca. 399-420). Arcadius or his advisors came up with the idea of asking the Persian *Šāhānšāh* Yazdgerd I to act as guardian for the newly born Theodosius II (408-450), because the Emperor could not trust any Roman to do this. Even more remarkable was the fact that Yazdgerd accepted the proposal and dispatched Antiochus to act as Theodosius' tutor and his representative in the Court. Arcadius was satisfied with the results and wrote a will in which he declared his son as *augustus* and Yazdgerd as Theodosius' guardian. These events took place between the years 401 and 404. Yazdgerd's choice as guardian was a good one, because Antiochus was staunchly Christian and raised Theodosius II as such. The thaw in the relationship between Rome and Persia led to positive consequences. Both empires adopted a policy of religious tolerance.³

The same approach was also adopted by the *Šāhānšāh* Yazdgerd I regarding his own son Bahrām. He placed Bahrām in the care of the Lakhmid King of Hira al-Mundhir, because he could not place any trust in the loyalty of his nobility and magi. It is unfortunate that we do not know who was imitating whom, on top of which there exists two versions. According to the first version, Bahrām was born in the seventh year of his reign (i.e. in about 405/406). This implies that Yazdgerd imitated Arcadius. According to the second version, Bahrām was 20 years old in 420 with the implication that Arcadius had imitated Yazdgerd. The former would mean that Bahrām was only 15-16 years old when he became ruler in 420, while the latter means that he was 20 years old when he assumed the power. The third

³ The dating of this key decision to the years 401-403 was suggested by Geoffrey GREATREX and Jonathan BARDILL in an important article in 1996. The discussion of the guardianship and Antiochus' position is based on: Greatrex and Bardill (the relevant Part 1 written by Greatrex); GREATREX (2008) 85 - 87; and REF2 32ff.

version is that Yazdgerd nominated al-Numan as ruler of Hira in about 404/5⁴ and made him guardian of his son Bahrām of unknown age. Most of the extant evidence support the alternative that al-Mundhir became ruler of Hira in 404/5 and was then given charge of Bahrām. Yazdgerd clearly felt that he could not trust his magnates and magi. In fact, according to Tabari I.848, only the envoys from other monarchs could speak freely in the presence of Yazdgerd, which is highly suggestive of the situation. Yazdgerd did not trust any of his own subjects (Tab. I.848). The tie between Bahrām and the Lakhmids was of the greatest historical importance as we shall see.

The peace between Rome and Persian was very advantageous for Persia because it was thanks to this that the Persians were able to consolidate their grip on Hira. Yazdgerd gave the Lakhmid al-Mundhir al-Numan two units of foreign soldiers to secure his position in the city against the native tribesmen (Tab. I.853). These consisted of the *Dawsar* consisting of 1,000 Tanukhids and the *al-Shahba* (the Brightly Gleaming) consisting of 1,000 Persian cataphracts (savarans). Tabari (I.853), claims that al-Numan (i.e. al-Mundhir) conducted deep raids into enemy territories, which included Syria. It is probable that these raids actually took place during the Romano-Persian War in 421-422 (see later).

Yazdgerd centralized the power into his own hands and sidelined the nobility and magi. The nobility yearned for war and the magi could not tolerate the policy of religious tolerance. Consequently, Yazdgerd's policies were opposed by both his nobles and magi with the result that, according to Ferdowsi (preface to chapter on Yazdgerd), his head chamberlain (Mihr-Narseh?) isolated the ruler so that he was unable to learn the true state of affairs. This suggests that the chamberlain was party to the subsequent plot to kill the *Šāhānšāh*.

Arcadius died on 1 May 408. As agreed, Yazdgerd secured the throne for Theodosius by threatening to wage war against anyone who attempted to oust Theodosius. The empires confirmed peace for 100 years and sealed it with a new trade treaty (CJ 4.63.4 dated to 23 march 409).⁵ Consequently, Arcadius' friendly policy towards Persia was continued under the guidance of *praefectus praetorio* Anthemius and eunuch Antiochus until 413/414. It was then that Theodosius II's sister Pulcheria became the de facto ruler of

⁴ As regards the dating of al-Mundhir's reign, I follow here Tabari (i.850-63) who clearly states that Yazdgerd placed his son Bahrām in the care of al-Numan, the king of Hira, who ruled 15 years under Yazdgerd I (i.e. from 404/5 until 420) and 14 years under Bahrām (i.e. from 420 until 434), after which he renounced the world to serve the God. This al-Numan (I.850-4) is clearly to be equated with the al-Mundhir (I.854-63) who raised Bahrām and then helped him to gain the throne in 420. In other words, I do not accept Shahid's dating 418-462 for the reign of al-Mundhir – Tabari's al-Numan and al-Mundhir are one and the same man. However, there also exists another possibility which is that Tabari has confused al-Mundhir with his son al-Numan (e.g. because al-Mundhir's name appears to have been al-Mundhir al-Numan) and that the Numan, who was on friendly terms with Christians and would have converted into Christianity in 410s had he not lived on Persian territory, was al-Mundhir's son. Sources for the friendly pro-Christian Numan collected in REF2, p. 35 - 6. For the system of coeducation between al-Hirans and Sasanians see TORAL-NIEHOFF.

⁵ BLOCKLEY (1992) 54.

the Empire. She managed to convince her brother Theodosius to abandon first his advisor *cubicularius* and eunuch Antiochus, and then Anthemius.⁶

Meanwhile, however, the Romans appear to have loaned gold-miners and architects to the Persians for two projects which were the digging up of gold and the building of the fort and walls at Derbend to oppose the Huns. The miners may also have been used to build of the first parts of the Great Walls of Gurgan where the *Šāhānšāh* can be attested to have been in the 410s. John Lydus claims that Yazdgerd had attempted and failed to make the Romans share the expenses of building and garrisoning the Derbend Pass with the result that he built it without Roman assistance, but in light of the fact that there were Roman gold-miners and architects in Persia and Arcadius had already paid money to the Persians in return for their help it seems probable that the Romans had just found a legal loophole that allowed them to claim not to have contributed anything even if they in practice did.⁷

Pulcheria was a religious bigot, which had immediate consequences for all non-Christians. The first to suffer were the Jews and pagans, but the fire worshippers would soon feel the same imperial wrath. Holum has also proved that the old Roman doctrine of Imperial Victory and Victory of Christ became mixed in the imagination of the deeply religious Pulcheria with the result that she thought that it would be necessary for the emperor to fight crusades in the name of Christ to prove his and her right to rule.

Yazdgerd's initial response was to attempt to defuse the situation by sending the Persian *catholicos* Yablaha as his envoy to Constantinople either in 418 or 419. The Romans in their turn sent Acacius of Amida to Persia to take part in the Synod of 420. Consequently, it seemed as if the empires could work out their differences, but then the Christians of Persia committed an outrage. The Bishop Abdaa destroyed a fire-altar in Khuzestan and refused to restore it. Had the East Romans urged Abdaa to do this so that they would get a *casus belli*? The hands of Yazdgerd were tied. He had to instigate a persecution of Christians to pacify the angry Persian nobility, magi, and populace either in late 419 or in early 420.⁸ It is probable that the advice to attempt to pacify the angry nobility and magi had come from the Prime Minister Mihr-Narseh, who is known to have been a devout Zoroastrian of the "sect" of Zurvan.

The beginning of the persecution of Christians is described by Cyril of Scythopolis.⁹ According to him, the magi stationed Saracen phylarchs at all points to

⁶ HOLUM (1977) 158 - 161; HOLUM (1982) 93ff.

⁷ See SYVÄNNE (2016) with Lydus (3.52-3, tr. in REF2, p. 20 - 21) and BLOCKLEY (1992) 50 - 53, for a fuller discussion. The PIPLA (598ff.) notes that at the time of his death Yazdgerd I was at Gorgan/Gurgan, and suggests the possibility that the building of the walls could have taken place under several rulers even if it is still clear that most of the building activity probably took place during the reigns of Yazdgerd II and Peroz. Of note in this case is that Yazdgerd I established an important mint there in the 410s. KETTENHOFEN (1994) has noted that it is quite possible that the first building of the Derbend defences took place under Yazdgerd I.

⁸ See SYVÄNNE (2016) with BLOCKLEY (1992) 56, for a fuller discussion.

⁹ *Vit. Euthym.* 10, tr. in REF2, p. 37.

prevent the flight of Christians to the Roman territory, but one of them, a man called Aspebetus considered the persecution inhuman and helped the Christians across the border and then took his family and wealth, and fled to the Roman territory. The *magister militum per Orientem* Anatolius received him with open arms and appointed him as phylarch of the Federate Saracens in Arabia. As noted by Shahid, Aspebetus was very high ranking defector from the Persian side. The name Aspebetus in all probability means the office of *Aspet* (cavalry commander).¹⁰

Yazgerd I did not live to see the results of this persecution. He was assassinated in 420. The official story claims that a white horse kicked and killed Yazdgerd and then disappeared. This happened either in Gurgan/Hyrcania or at Tus. The latter of these belonged to the Kanarangiyān family. Ferdowsi and Dinawari provide us with a list of conspirators against Yazdgerd and his offspring, which include the Mihrans, the Karins, and Kanarangiyān. Pourshariati considers the list anachronistic, but I like Christensen see no reason for this.¹¹ On top of that, the rebels were soon joined by other noble houses the Surens and Isbahbudhans. See below.

The members of the plot decided that they would not accept Yazdgerd's offspring as their ruler. Their choice was to nominate Xusrō, a member of the collateral line of the Arsacids/Sasanians, as *Šāhānšāh*.¹² Naturally enough, this was not accepted by Yazdgerd's sons. Šāpur, the eldest of the sons and the *marzpān* of Armenia, marched to the scene, but he was assassinated almost immediately by the nobility. Bahrām in his turn sought help from his tutor al-Mundhir who decided to back up his claim. The Persarmenian revolt ensured that the nobles lacked adequate means to suppress the Arabs and Bahrām, while the Arabs did not possess enough men to challenge the remaining forces to a decisive battle. Consequently, Al-Mundhir, who was a veteran commander, chose to wear out the enemy with a guerrilla war. Al-Mundhir dispatched horsemen under his son al-Numan against the royal twin cities of Ctesiphon and Bih-Ardašīr (Vēh Ardašīr) which lay on the opposite sides of the Euphrates.

The Arabs adopted a tactic which they were to put to great use during the Muslim conquests, which consisted of the pitching of an encampment near the cities which was followed up by raids. The raiders had orders to pillage and take captives, but not to shed blood which would only have made future negotiations more difficult. If the Persians sent soldiers against the raiders, the raiders were ordered to engage them (presumably with skirmishes while retreating into the desert).¹³ The nobles whose estates were being pillaged

¹⁰ SHAHID (1989) 43, thinks that the name referred to the office of *spahbed*, but in my opinion the office must be that of *Aspet/Asbedh* (cavalry commander). Full analysis of the sources for Aspebetus in SHAHID (1989), esp. 40 - 49. Note, however, that my interpretation differs slightly from Shahid's.

¹¹ POURSHARIATI (2006) 173 ff., (2008) 66 – 69; CHRISTENSEN (1936) 269 - 270.

¹² The following is based on Tabari I.854ff.

¹³ Compare with the tactics adopted by the Muslims before the Battle of Al-Qadisiyah c. 634-6. The position of Yazdgerd III's (632-651) was still weak and the pillaging of the lands belonging to the nobles forced him to commit his army against the Muslims in their own chosen battlefield. For a fuller analysis, see SYVÄNNE (2014).

forced the new ruler, whose position was still weak, to do something. Consequently, the ‘great men of the state’ and the nobles dispatched Yazdgerd’s former head of the Chancery Juwani (Ferdowsi’s Javanui) to negotiate and a meeting of the rulers was organized. Al-Mundhir and Bahrām took with them 30,000 horsemen so that the Arab forces supporting Bahrām’s claim consisted of 40,000 horsemen.

The nobility presented its demands: 1) Bahrām should abandon the anti-nobility policies of his father; 2) the taxes paid by the nobility should be lowered; 3) the army should be paid greater salaries; 4) the nobility should be given greater offices. In other words, the nobility wanted its prerogatives restored and wanted to see its feudal obligations (taxes) lowered. To put it simply, the higher payments from the imperial treasury to the army obviously lowered the cost of feudal obligations for the nobles.¹⁴ Bahrām promised to do all these, but it was then that the nobility claimed that they could not break their oaths to Xusrō. The nobles agreed make a compromise on the basis of Bahrām’s suggestion. The imperial regalia were to be placed before two lions so that the first of the claimants to the throne (either Bahrām or Xusrō) to snatch these would be the new ruler. I see no reason to doubt this¹⁵. This sort of bravado could be expected from men who evaluated personal bravery above all else. The chief *mobadh/mobad*, who had the responsibility of crowning each new ruler, placed the imperial regalia and crown on the ground, and Bistam the *Iṣbahbadh* released the two hungry lions with their cubs (Tabari I.861). The chief *mobadh* was clearly the *hazārūft* (Prime Minister) Mihr-Narseh of the Suren family, while Bistam the *Isbabadh* should be identified as Beṣṭām of the *Isbahbudhan* family, the hereditary commander of the cavalry forces.¹⁶ As noted above, practically all of the Persian noble houses had joined ranks with the conspirators after the assassination of Yazdgerd. This unity of the nobility did not bode well for Bahrām. Bahrām suggested that Xusrō would attempt first, but was forced to take his chances first. Contrary to the expectations of Xusrō and the nobility, Bahrām killed both lions with a mace and took the regalia. Bahrām’s personal bravery and prowess with the weapons were to become his trademarks. It was thanks to this that he was able to introduce military reforms that changed the way in which the Persians fought.

Regardless of having gained the throne Bahrām’s position was by no means secure. He needed to please the nobility and the *hazārūft* and Chief *Mobadh* Mihr-Narseh. This meant the continuation of the persecution of Christians, which naturally meant that ever more Christians fled to the Roman side of the border. The Persarmenians also opposed the rise of Bahrām and the persecution of Christians by revolting with the result that even more Christians fled over the border. Pulcheria and Theodosius could not overlook such actions against their fellow Christians. The Romans started to make preparations for the war already in the spring of 420 or possibly even earlier. Pulcheria’s government issued an Edict¹⁷ on

¹⁴ For a discussion of the circumstances, see POURSHARIATI (2008) 67 - 70.

¹⁵ For a discussion of symbolic meaning of lion in Sasanian Art see: TANABE (1990) 32, 35-39; GALL (1977) 151; HERRMANN (1970) 167.

¹⁶ BOSWORTH (p.91) identified the *Isbahad* with the *Spahbed* who according to him was the supreme commander of the army (i.e. the *Iran-Spahbed*). I have here preferred to identify the *Isbahad* with the family name.

¹⁷ CJ 8.10.10, tr. in REF2, p. 36 - 37.

5 May 420 which permitted the building of walls on private lands in the eastern provinces.¹⁸ It was only the revolt of the soldiers¹⁹ that prevented the launching of the invasion of Persian territory in 420. Pulcheria intended to launch a Crusade against the infidels. She started to issue a new coin type, the *Long-Cross solidus*, which signified the victory of Christ. The *Long-cross* was to be the symbol of the emperor and his Christian army in the coming Crusade against Persia. Pulcheria's *Long-Cross* was also used as an Imperial Battle Standard so that it now served the same purpose for the East Romans as the *labarum* had previously done for Constantine the Great. A golden cross was also erected at Golgotha to demonstrate the victory of Christ over His enemies and the right arm of St. Stephen Protomartyr was brought to Constantinople where a church was built for it in the imperial palace. Pulcheria and Theodosius were to be identified with the 'first athlete of Christ'. Pulcheria did not stop even at this. Her and her sisters' vows of virginity were to be seen as



Rough Word-art sketch of Solidus of Pulcheria minted in Constantinople ca. 420-22.

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self-sacrifices for the sake of Roman victory.²⁰ Pulcheria's religious propaganda worked remarkably well. It uplifted the morale of the army just when it was needed most. We should not forget that the army had just mutinied against the imperial authorities.

3. The Persian War 421-422²¹

The sources for the Persian War of 421-422 are unfortunately very defective. The most important of these are Socrates (neglects Armenian events)²² and Moses Khorenatsi (neglects the Roman role)²³ and the Georgian Chronicles.²⁴ The last mentioned has been neglected by modern research because the events in it have been misdated by about 100 years.

The reasons for the war were: 1) the persecution of Christians in Persia (the treaty between the empires granted religious freedom); 2) the granting of a place of refuge for the

¹⁸ HOLUM (1977) 162.

¹⁹ Marcellinus Comes 420.2, tr. in REF2, p. 37.

²⁰ HOLUM (1977); HOLUM (1982) 103ff.

²¹ SYVÄNNE (2016). I have used as sources the sources mentioned here as well as the sources collected in the REF2. The following analysis of the events is based on these and on the valuable modern analyses of GREATREX (1993, 1996, 2008), HOLUM (1977, 1982), SCHRIER (1992), BLOCKLEY (1992), SHAHID (1989).

²² Socrates 7.18ff, tr. in REF2, p. 38 - 40.

²³ Moses Khorenatsi, 326ff.

²⁴ *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 216ff.

Christians in the Roman territory (the treaty between the empires forbid the granting of asylum to the defectors); 3) the Persian refusal to hand over the Roman gold-miners who had been working in Persian territory; 4) the confiscation and robbery of Roman merchants in Persian territory; 5) the need for the Romans to help the Christians of Persarmenia.

Moses Khorenatsi's account²⁵ clarifies the circumstances in the immediate aftermath of the death of Yazdgerd. When Šāpur/Shapuh, the eldest son of Yazdgerd and *marzpān* of Armenia, heard of this he marched to Ctesiphon where he was immediately assassinated by the nobility. The Armenian general (*sparapet*?) Nerses Chichrakatsi assembled the Armenian princes with their feudal retinues and gave battle to the Persian army. Moses claims that the Persians were defeated and that their general was killed by Aprsam Spanduni as a result of which the Persians scattered leaderless into the mountains and Armenia remained at anarchy for three years (420-423). This account does not make any sense. The likeliest explanation is that it was actually the Armenian general who was killed by Aprsam Spanduni and it was thanks to this that Armenia was at anarchy.

Moses also claims that Bahrām V Gōr (420-438/9) concluded peace with the 'Greeks' and sought vengeance against the Persarmenians. This is incorrect and should be taken to refer to the situation after 422. It was the death of the Armenian general that enabled the Persians to invade Armenia in 420 as a result of which the Armenian Patriarch Sahak together with his grandson Vardan Mamikonean and Saint Mesrop fled to the Roman sector of Armenia.²⁶ Pulcheria/Theodosius ordered the *magister militum per Orientem* Anatolius to assist the Armenian rebels against the Persians. Anatolius was also ordered to build a city called Theodosiopolis (mod. Turkish Erzurum, Armenian Karin) in Armenia to serve as a forward base for the Roman armies in the region. In other words, the Romans started the war in response to the Armenian and Christian plight just like Quodvultdeus and Socrates claimed. According to Socrates, the Romans made a pre-emptive strike.

My analysis of the Georgian Chronicles²⁷ clarifies the issue further. The reign of the first Vaxtang has been misdated by about 100 years by the Chronicles and by modern historians, but this analysis will set the record straight.²⁸ Vaxtang was the grandson of Mirian who lived during the reign of Constantine the Great and cannot therefore have lived at the turn of the sixth century.

²⁵ Moses Khorenatsi, 326ff.

²⁶ Moses Khorenatsi, 326ff. and Vardan Arewelci, p. 169.

²⁷ *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 216ff.

²⁸ The mix-up has resulted from the fact that some unknown Georgian author has confused two different Vaxtangs with each other so that he believed that there was just one Vaxtang who lived at the turn of the sixth century. This author has therefore misplaced the reign of the first Vaxtang to the wrong period probably because he has mixed the Roman general Leo with the Emperor Leo, and the reigns of Theodosius I and Theodosius II, and the emperor Zeno with the general Zeno. The Georgian Chronicles are clearly based on oral traditions that have been superimposed on written histories in a manner that has confused the dates and individuals.

According to the version preserved by the Georgian Chronicles when Xuasro (Yazdgerd I) was succeeded by his son Xuasro (Bahrām) the latter sent a message to Vaxtang in which he presented two demands: 1) Vaxtang was to hand his daughter in marriage (from the first marriage with a Persian lady); 2) the Iberians were to join the invasion of Greece (East Rome). Vaxtang refused and ordered his subjects to abandon all unfortified villages and cities and to flee to the Caucasus or to Kaxeti which was forested and considered impenetrable for the Persians. In the meanwhile, Vaxtang informed the emperor and divided his forces so that: 1) his eldest son King Dachi was sent to the Valley of Lopoti; 2) wife and children were left in the Valley of Ujarma; 3) Demetre, Nerse and Biwritian were left at Mcxeta; 4) while Vaxtang himself occupied the forward based citadel at Darpaka in Kaxeti.

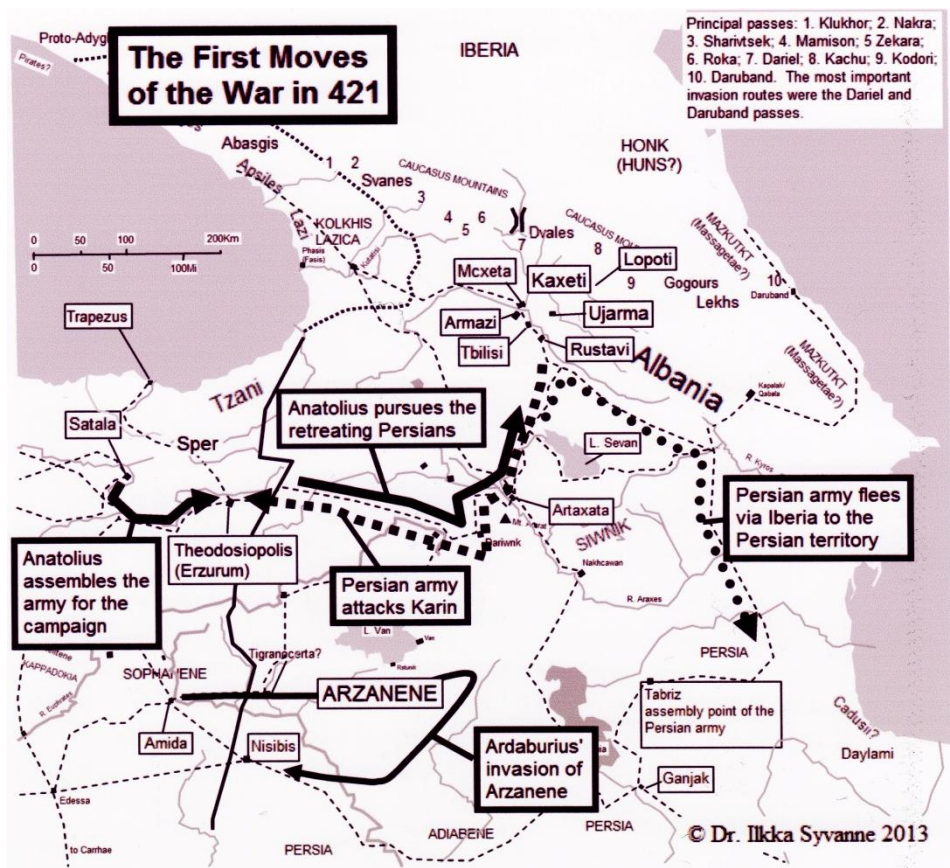
The Persian King Xuasro (Bahrām) advanced into Iberia and destroyed a number of places. When Bahrām reached Iori in Kaxeti, he halted because Vaxtang's army was at Darpaka. The armies fought inconclusively for three days after which Vaxtang resorted to a desperate stratagem. The Chronicles claim that the Iberian army consisted of 240,000 men and the Persian army of 740,000 men. These figures are impossibly high, but if one takes off one zero from the end, the figures are about right. Vaxtang placed his infantry by the cliffs and part of the cavalry in front of the enemy so that the Persians would believe that the entire Iberian army stood in front of them, and then advanced with 100,000 men (i.e. with 10,000 men) against the Persian camp during the night. The Persians were fooled and when Vaxtang then attacked at dawn he managed to advance as far as the royal tent. The Chronicle claims that the Persian king fled on horseback so that Vaxtang was able to kill only Bartam (Bahrām) the son of the King. It is clear that this the author has confused Xuasro and Bahrām. The king who fled was no-one else but Bahrām V Gōr. The Persians are claimed to have lost 130,000 (= 13,000) men, while the Iberians are claimed to have lost 28,000 (= 2,800) men. The Iberian victory proved Pyrrhic, because Vaxtang had been shot in the breast by a Persian (Bahrām?) and the arrow had penetrated his lung. Note the power of this arrow shot! Vaxtang had been mortally wounded and he went to Ujarma to die. He ordered the generals to stay in their posts, but these proved incapable of resisting the Persians who had regrouped their army at Rustavi.

The Persians destroyed Tpilisi and Armazi, but were unable to take Mcxeta. At this point the Chronicle²⁹ includes another instance of the chronological mix up and claims that it was then that the King of the Greeks died and was succeeded by Zeno (474-491). It is probable that the chronicler has confused the emperor Zeno with the general Zeno³⁰ who was the *magister militum per Orientem* in 447-451 and therefore likely to have served in the east also during the 421-422 war. The Chronicle claims that it was "Zeno" who came to Sper with the intention of advancing into Iberia to assist Vaxtang against the Persians, but when he learnt of the fate of Vaxtang he halted at Kanu-kalaki. The Persians under their king Xuasro (Bahrām) marched to the scene and fought with the Romans an inconclusive

²⁹ *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 221 - 222.

³⁰ Zenon 6 in the PLRE2.

but very bloody battle at Karnipora (possibly to be identified with Karin)³¹ after which they withdrew via Iberia back to Persia. This suggests that the Romans had probably employed a hollow/oblong infantry square which the Persian cavalry had failed to break. According to the Armenian version of the Chronicle, “Zeno” came to Sper to assist the Iberians, but then returned back to Karin (Theodosiopolis/Erzurum) when he learnt of Vaxtang’s wound. It was after this that the Persian King destroyed Tpilisi and Armazi, and the surroundings



of Mxeta, and marched against the Greeks (=Romans). The battle ended in a stalemate and the Persians withdrew via Iberia to their own land.

On the basis of this it is easy to see that the Romans were planning to launch a pre-emptive strike from Karin/Theodosiopolis against the Persians and that the Zeno of the Chronicle hides behind it the name of the *magister militum per Orientem* Anatolius who may have been assisted by the Isaurian general Zeno.³² The Isaurians would have been more than eager to contribute their armed strength to such a campaign as it is quite clear that the gold-miners that the Persians had loaned consisted mainly of the Isaurians. The Persians are likely to have marched from the neighbourhood of Mxeta to Artaxata in Armenia and from

³¹ THOMSON’s note in the translation p. 222.

³² Zenon 6 in the PLRE2.

there to the city of Theodosiopolis. The intention was to protect Persarmenia and Iberia against the Romans and to put a stop to the building of Theodosiopolis. The fact that the battle between the Romans (with their Armenian allies) and the Persians was a bloody stalemate is misleading, because the Romans under Anatolius actually won by not losing the encounter. The Persians were forced to withdraw all the way to Iberia and from there to Persia. Of particular note is the fact that the Persians did not make any attempt to defend Persarmenia. This means that Anatolius had liberated Persarmenia and Iberia from the Persian yoke. It is also very probable that Anatolius pursued the Persians, because it is difficult to see how the Persians would have abandoned Persarmenia and Iberia if he did not. There was also another reason for the Persian eagerness to return to the Persian territory, which was that the Romans under Ardaburius had invaded Arzanene and were therefore threatening Bahrām's route of retreat (see above).

The action on the southern theatre of operations has been described by Socrates. According to him, the Romans launched a pre-emptive strike before the Persians could act, which would have taken place at about the same time as Anatolius assembled his army at Karin/Theodosiopolis.³³ Theodosius/Pulcheria placed Ardaburius in charge of the campaign and he in turn duly invaded Persian Arzanene through Roman Armenia. It is possible that Ardaburius may also have attempted to cut off the route of retreat from the Persian *Šāhānšāh*, but if this was the goal then it failed. The Persians in the theatre of operations were commanded by Narseh. He attempted to stop the invasion on the border, but was defeated in a battle undoubtedly because the Romans outnumbered him. The defeated Narseh retreated and Ardaburius was able to advance into Arzanene. Narseh made a diversionary invasion of Roman Mesopotamia, which worked because Ardaburius returned on the double after having ravaged Arzanene and forced Narseh to seek shelter from Nisibis. Narseh proposed that they would set a date for battle, but Ardaburius answered that the Romans would fight only when it suited them and not when the Persians wanted.

Narseh sent urgent calls for help to Bahrām, who duly assembled a large army against Ardaburius. According to the Roman intelligence reports, Bahrām collected all his available forces against Ardaburius, which appears to be accurate because it was not long after this that the Persians faced troubles in the east. When the news of this massive build up of forces was brought to Constantinople, the emperor ordered the transferral of reinforcements from the Balkans to the East which created a power vacuum in the Balkans that was duly exploited by the Huns. It is clear that the Romans had a well working intelligence apparatus working inside the Persian territory.

In the meanwhile, Ardaburius had besieged Narseh inside the city of Nisibis. Bahrām needed to bring relief fast if he wanted to prevent the fall of this important bulwark, but Bahrām was also aware that the Romans were sending reinforcements to the scene from the Balkans, which meant that he too needed even more men. Consequently, Bahrām asked his old tutor Alamundaras (al-Mundhir) to come to his assistance. This pleased al-Mundhir.

³³ Most of the evidence mentioned hereafter have been usefully collected in REF2.

He promised nothing less than to deliver Antioch into his hands, but the Romans forestalled his moves. We do not know what route al-Mundhir took, but we do know that the Romans surprised him near the River Euphrates with the result that the Arabs panicked and plunged into the Euphrates River where about 100,000 of them perished according to Socrates.³⁴ The figure is exaggerated, but one can make the educated guess that the overall strength for al-Mundhir's force could have reached the figure of about 100,000 men (40,000 Arabs, and 40,000 Persians and their servants). Ardaburius sent Vitianus to pursue the remnants of al-Mundhir's force. My interpretation is that Ardaburius abandoned the siege of Nisibis when he learnt that Bahrām was approaching and that the Saracens had invaded further south, and then attacked with his cavalry al-Mundhir's army from behind and then marched back against Bahrām who in the meanwhile appears to have besieged Theodosiopolis (Resaina).

According to Theodoret's account Bahrām besieged the city of Theodosiopolis (Resaina) for 30 days during which he used 'thousands' of siege engines and numerous siege towers. Theodoret claims that the Roman generals did not bring any help and that it was the Bishop Eunomius who forced the enemy to abandon the siege. Eunomius ordered a stone thrower called Apostle Thomas be brought on the battlements after which he ordered the artillerymen to shoot at one of the enemy kings because he had blasphemed the Lord. The stone landed on his foul mouth and scattered his brains on the ground. Theodoret claims that Bahrām was frightened, withdrew and made peace.

Theodoret's account is clearly heavily coloured by Christian propaganda, because we learn from another Christian chronicler Socrates that Theodoret has exaggerated the inaction of the generals. According to the summary of the events in Socrates³⁵: "What engagements took place, and how Areobindus, another Roman general, killed the bravest of the Persians in single combat, and by what means Ardaburius destroyed seven Persian commanders in an ambush, and Vitianus, another Roman general, vanquished the remainder of the Saracens, I believe I ought to pass by, lest I should digress too far from my subject." This means that Ardaburius initiated a guerrilla campaign to force the Persians to abandon their siege. The defeat of the remnants of the Saracens would mean that Vitianus conducted the pursuit with ruthless efficiency. The killing of seven Persian commanders in an ambush would probably mean the destruction of the shielding force posted by Bahrām after which Bahrām would have abandoned the siege of Theodosiopolis/Resaina to face the Romans. It was then that *comes foederatum*³⁶ Areobindus fought his single combat with the bravest of the Persians. This last feat of arms has been preserved by two sources and should not be doubted despite the fact that there are discrepancies in the accounts. According to Malalas the duel took place only after Procopius had arrived on the scene with the reinforcements from the Balkans while Socrates clearly suggests that this took place before

³⁴ See SYVÄNNE (2016) and GREATREX (1993) 2, for additional details.

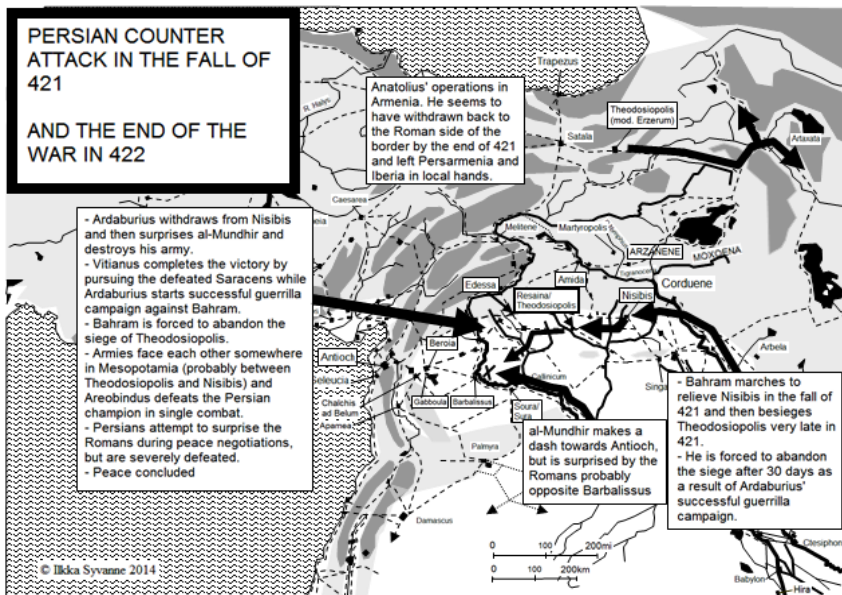
³⁵ tr. E. WALFORD, H. DE VALOIS, p. 353.

³⁶ Note that this is the first extant referral to the existence of this office and it suggests that the East Romans had integrated the *foederati* into their military system more strongly than was the case in the west.

the arrival of Procopius. I have opted to follow the latter version on the basis of the description of the subsequent battle (see below).

The single combat between the Gothic *comes foederatum* Areobindus and the Persian champion would have taken place immediately after Bahrām had withdrawn from Resaina/Theodosiopolis in very early 422. According to Malalas, the Persian king suggested that instead of fighting a pitched battle, each side should choose a champion and let the result of this combat decide the war. Bahrām promised to conclude a 50 year peace and pay tribute, if the Roman champion won. The Roman commander accepted the challenge and sent Areobindus forward while the Persians sent Ardazanes from the division of the Immortals. Areobindus used a lasso while the Persian used a lance. When the champions charged at each other Areobindus avoided the enemy’s lance by bending down to his right while he lassoed the enemy who was then duly brought down from his horse and killed by Areobindus. According to Malalas, Bahrām honoured his word and concluded the peace, but he has left out the final battle which is fortunately described by Socrates.

The above-mentioned accounts of the single combat between Areobindus and Ardazanes are important also for another reason, which is that it appears to describe a situation which is familiar to us from the sixth century Strategikon. The presence of the *comes foederatum* in the army suggests that he and his *foederati* were placed in the centre of the first line (Areobindus would also have been the second-in-command *hypostrategos*) while the commander *strategos* Ardaburius stood in the middle of the second support line



just like in the array described by the Strategikon. The size of this cavalry army would therefore have been about 31,000-49,000 horsemen plus squires, servants and other non-combatants, which also gives us the minimum size for the Persian army.

It should not be forgotten that this war did not happen in a vacuum, but events elsewhere had direct bearing on it. Theodosius II's marriage with Athenais/Eudocia resulted in the downfall of Pulcheria and the rise of the peace with Persia party. Pulcheria had committed a series of unforgivable mistakes and had almost embroiled East Rome in a civil war with West Rome at a time when East Rome was fighting against the Persians and were threatened by the Huns. The emperor nominated Anthemius' son-in-law Procopius to succeed Anatolius as *magister militum per Orientem* already in the autumn of 421. Procopius and his army (presumably consisting mainly of the reinforcements from the Balkans) reached the eastern front just in time to take part in the last and decisive battle very early in 422, but even before this happened the imperial government dispatched *magister officiorum* Helion to the headquarters of Ardaburius with instructions to seek peace. It is probable that he arrived already before the above-mentioned single combat of the champions. The Romans urgently needed peace because the Huns had invaded the Balkans. The Persians in their turn needed peace for the very same reason. The Hephthalite Huns had invaded the East. See below.³⁷

4. The “100 Years’ Peace”

After the death of Ardazanes, the two armies stood opposite each other while envoys discussed the terms of peace. The Persians were pressed for time because they were also suffering from the dearth of supplies caused by the Roman guerrilla campaign. However, according to Socrates,³⁸ the Corps of Immortals opposed the conclusion of peace with Rome before they would have fought against them. The members of this corps claimed that it was now possible to surprise the Romans because they were off-guard thanks to the ongoing negotiations. Bahrām accepted their advice.

We do not know the name of the commander of the Immortals or the name of the commander leading the Persians against the Romans at this time, but since Tabari claims that Mihr-Narseh commanded 40,000 men against the East Romans it is quite possible that he was the commander of the Immortals and of the Persian army sent against the East Romans and that he had at his disposal 40,000 horsemen.

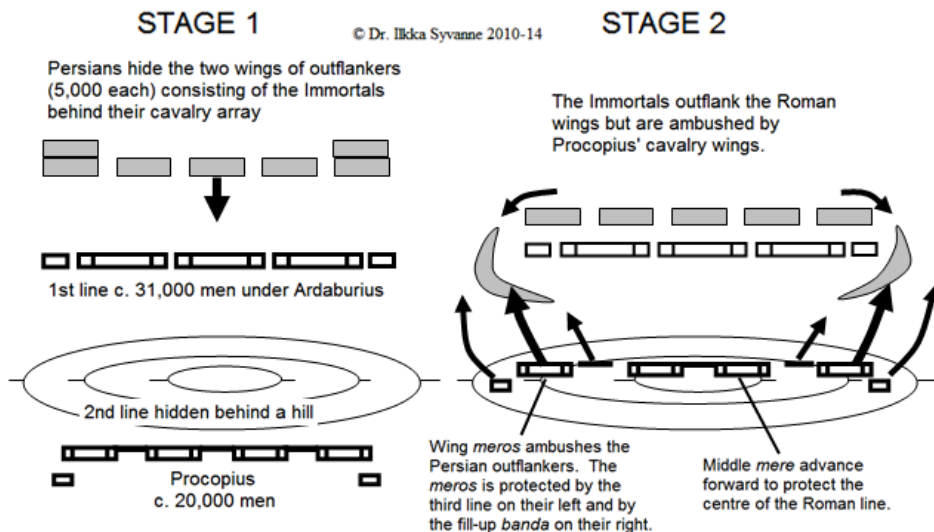
The Persian plan of attack consisted of two parts: 1) surprise attack during peace negotiations; 2) hiding of the second line (consisting of the Immortals) behind the first line to ambush the Romans. The Persian plan failed either because the Romans guessed what the Persians were planning or because they had prior knowledge of it. What is certain is that the Romans learnt of the approach of the Persian cavalry force in a timely fashion (from scouts and possibly from spies/deserters as well) and were able to deploy their army for combat. The Persians were clearly unaware of the arrival of Procopius with the reinforcements, which the Romans exploited. Ardaburius deployed one line of cavalry in front of a hill to lure the Persians forward while the reinforcements under Procopius were posted behind the hill in ambush. The Persians were fooled into the belief that the Romans had deployed only

³⁷ Fuller discussion of these events in SYVÄNNE (2016) and HOLUM (1977, 1982).

³⁸ Socrates 7.20, tr. in REF2 , p. 40 - 41.

one line of cavalry and sent their wings of Immortals forward to outflank the Romans only to be outflanked by themselves. According to Socrates' account the Persian army was completely surrounded and annihilated. This is confirmed by Theophanes's confused account.³⁹ The Persians were encircled and the entire force including the 10,000 Immortals and all their generals were killed. The following diagrams show the different stages of the battle.

Despite the Roman victory the following terms of peace were not too unfavourable for the Persians because the East Romans needed peace so that they could transfer their forces against the Huns who were invading the Balkans. Conversely, Bahrām had every reason to conclude the peace. He had suffered a defeat, his army was suffering from lack of supplies, Armenia and Iberia were in a state of revolt, and the Turks/Hephthalites had invaded. It is quite likely that the defeat of the Persian armies resulting from the policies followed by the nobles gave Bahrām greater amount of political freedom – after all there was little else that he could do but to conclude the peace.



According to Holum⁴⁰ and Blockley⁴¹ the terms of peace were as follows: 1) Each side agreed not to receive any Saracen deserters from the other side; 2) Each side agreed not to construct new fortifications near the border; 3) Both sides agreed to follow policy of religious tolerance. In contrast to Holum, Blockley and the consensus view, I see no reason to think that the Romans would have agreed to pay any money to the Persians in return for their defence of the Derbend Pass. The Romans made this agreement only after the war of 440.⁴² On top of that, Moses and Isaac of Antioch,⁴³ imply in no uncertain terms that the

³⁹ Theophanes's confused account (A.M. 5918).

⁴⁰ HOLUM (1977) 170.

⁴¹ BLOCKLEY (1992) 57-8.

⁴² SYVÄNNE (2016).

⁴³ see REF2, pp. 44 - 45.

Romans were in possession of the city of Nisibis in 440, which does strongly suggest that the Persians had to hand over Nisibis to the Romans as part of the peace treaty. The Persians were clearly in no position to make demands of payment to the Romans. Regardless, it is still clear that the Romans did also make concessions. This included most importantly Persarmenia which was left within the Persian sphere of influence but so that the Armenians would retain political and religious autonomy under their own ruler.⁴⁴ Regardless of this, it is still clear that the terms of peace were such that both sides could accept these. The gesture of goodwill by the Bishop of Amida Acacius⁴⁵ removed the final obstacles to the peace. The bishop ransomed 7,000 Persian prisoners from the Roman army and then released them. This impressed Bahrām so much that he asked the emperor’s permission for a meeting of this remarkable man, which was granted. The use of bishops and clemency clearly created an atmosphere of trust between the two superpowers and it is likely that this is another instance of the influence wielded by Antiochus the Persian at the Roman court at this time.

Bahrām was quite prepared to make concessions to the Armenians because he knew that it was impossible to hold the country without the support of the Armenian princes⁴⁶ especially at a time when the Hephthalites were threatening the very existence of the realm. It was for this reason that Bahrām granted general amnesty to all Armenian rebels together with religious freedom and gave to the Armenians a new Arsacid king who took the name of Ardašīr. Therefore, Persarmenia remained securely in the Persian sphere of influence as long as the Persians were prepared to follow the policy of religious tolerance.

The war also changed the geopolitical position of Iberia. As a result of this war Iberia became temporarily a Roman client state, but before his death Vaxtang in 421 divided the nation into two halves so that his eldest son Dachi (by the Persian wife) was nominated as King of Iberia but in such a manner that Vaxtang’s widow Helena and her children were placed under the custody of the three *eristavis* (feudal lords) of the west. The descendants of Dachi became eventually subjects of Persia while the descendants of Helena became subjects of Rome.

5. The Great Adventures of Bahrām v Gōr during the Years of 423-438⁴⁷

As noted above, after Bahrām had concluded peace with Rome he still needed to negotiate peace with the Persarmenian rebels in such a way that it respected the agreement reached with the Romans. He needed to pacify Armenia before moving against the ‘Turks’ (Hephthalites/Chionitai) who had invaded with 250,000 horsemen. We can use this information to clarify Tabari’s otherwise difficult description of Bahrām’s Turkish war.

⁴⁴ see the events of 428 with Moses Khorenatsi, p. 331, 339 - 340 and PLRE 2 Dionysius 13.

⁴⁵ Socrates 7.21, tr. in REF2 , p. 43.

⁴⁶ Moses Khorenatsi, p. 330 - 331.

⁴⁷ This chapter and everything else after that are original to this article and have not appeared and will not appear anywhere else unless given permission. It is based on mainly on Tabari I.854ff. with the commentary of BOSWORTH. However, in contrast to BOSWORTH I am more inclined to accept that there is usually a germ of truth behind Tabari’s account which at times does seem to include legendary elements.

Contrary to the common opinion among the western historians, there is no reason to think the figure of 250,000 being much inflated – the Chinese sources do confirm the existence of truly huge armies for the Central Asian theatre of war, which makes this figure quite believable for the overall strength of the invading force (including the non-combatants) which would have been divided into at least two to three armies for logistical reasons. One should not forget that the Mongols also fielded large armies when they invaded the areas in question!

It is usually assumed that the Turks against whom Bahrām fought in Khwarazm/Merv were either the Chionitai/Hephthalite or the Kidarite-Kushans, but in light of the fact that Bahrām subsequently fought as an ally of the Guptas in India it is clear that one can rule out the Kidarites. It is probable that the Kidarites would have been the ones that had reconquered the Eastern Persia and Sind so that the Guptas and Persians would have found reason to cooperate with each other in those areas. This suggests the probability that the Turks in question would have been the so-called Hephthalite Huns as suggested by Kaveh Farrokh (209-212) who are known to have pushed the Kidarites towards India. The Hephthalite Huns and Chionitai in their turn may mean the same group of people.

According to Tabari, after the Turks had invaded, Bahrām, in the company of 300 guards and seven nobles, went to the Fire-Temple of Ganzak (the fire-temple of the military caste) and from there to Armenia to ‘hunt’. Bahrām made his brother Narseh as viceroy. This trip is clearly a confused referral to the peace negotiations conducted by Bahrām in person with the Armenian rebels. In other words, when Tabari claims that Bahrām resorted to a ruse against the invading Turks by leaving his brother Narseh as viceroy while he went on a ‘hunting trip’ to Armenia, this trip/ruse hides behind it the actual peace negotiations with the Armenian rebels. While Bahrām negotiated with the Armenians, his brother Narseh (Tabari claims that it was the ‘people’) sent an embassy to the Hephthalites which promised yearly payments of tribute. Bahrām’s intention was only to lull the ‘Turks’ into false sense of security so that he could attack them immediately after he would have concluded peace with the Armenian rebels. It is quite probable that the appointment of Narseh as viceroy reflected Bahrām’s greater freedom of action in the aftermath of the crushing defeat suffered by Mihr-Narseh and nobles.

Bahrām’s ploy worked. The peace with the Perarmenians secured the rear, and the visiting of the Fire-Temple of Soldiers at Ganzak encouraged the soldiers. Bahrām had clearly learnt from the Romans the value of using religion to improve the fighting spirit of the army. The Romans had improved the morale with religious symbolism after the military mutiny and now Bahrām did the same in the aftermath of the previous military defeats. At about the same time when this happened Bahrām received a spy who had returned from Merv with accurate information of the enemy’s plans. The spy informed Bahrām that the Khagan was not suspecting anything. Consequently, Bahrām was able to put into effect his well-prepared lightning attack.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Tabari I.864.

We should not make the mistake of assuming that Bahrām's own army would have been as small as stated by Tabari (300 bodyguards and seven nobles). According to another Arab source studied by Dr. Kaveh Farrokh, Bahrām actually had a picked force of 7,000 horsemen who were ordered to ride on camels and take two horses each (two horses per horseman mentioned by Ferdowsi). One of the two horses was to be one-year old spare horse. The seven nobles should be seen to refer to the seven noble houses so that each was required to choose 1,000 horsemen⁴⁹ for the campaign so that there were altogether 7,300 horsemen plus the officers and commanders in the army. The operational security was guaranteed by the discovery of a Hephthalite spy-ring before the campaign and with the practise of marching only during the nights. The army marched from Armenia to the southern coast of the Caspian Sea and then along it to Gurgan and from there through Khurasan to Nisa/Nasa and from there to Merv. The Khagan was encamped at the village of Khusmayhan in the Merv Oasis. The night before the attack Bahrām ordered the men to sew 7,000 cowhides and then inflate them so that the hides could be filled with rocks. These rock-filled cowhides were then hung on the 7,000 one year-old spare horses. When the time came to attack at dawn, the spare horses were released into the Hephthalite camp to create chaos while the 7,300 horsemen charged straight at the tent of the Khagan. According to Tabari, Bahrām killed the Khagan with his own hand. When the nomads witnessed this, it was every man for himself with the result that the fleeing 'Turks' left their families and baggage in Persian hands after which Bahrām marched to Merv.⁵⁰ The numerically superior enemy force had now been crushed with this one finely aimed surgical strike.

Bahrām's campaign reflected his own experiences and lessons learnt. Bahrām's use of the small numbers of elite troops for a surprise attack against enemy encampment had undoubtedly been copied from his enemy Vaxtang who had used the very same tactic against Bahrām to great effect. Bahrām was clearly quite ready to learn from his mistakes and quite prepared to copy from his enemies whatever was found useful. On the other hand, the use of the camels for travel and horses for surprise attack reflected Bahrām's Arab upbringing. He was truly an Arab in Persian disguise.

The victory over the Hephthalites was complete and Bahrām was also able to annex territories formerly belonging to the Turks. Bahrām appointed a *marzpān* to take charge of these conquered lands, set up a tower on the new border, sent generals to conquer Transoxania from the Turks (= Kidarites or Chionitai or other Turks/Huns), and then returned to the temple of Ganzak to offer his thanks for the success achieved. After this, Bahrām returned to Ctesiphon and sent his brother Narseh to Khurasan where he was to establish his residence at Balkh (former Bactra). In the meanwhile, Bahrām' military commanders had already subjected the Turks of Transoxania to tribute paying status. The booty that Bahrām had captured from the Khagan enabled him to remit the land taxes for a period of three years in addition to which he gave great sums of money to the poor to

⁴⁹ The seven nobles were usually required to send 10,000 horsemen each for service for a grand total of 70,000 horsemen in addition to which came the royal forces. It should be noted that this is my conclusion, see MLHR vol. 1.

⁵⁰ Tabari I.864; FARROKH (2007) 212; BOSWORTH, p. 96, n. 246.

improve their lot and bribed the nobles with 20 million ‘dirhams’. Contrary to the consensus opinion among the historians, I see no reason not to accept this version. The subsequent events make clear that Bahrām had in all probability taken control of the above-mentioned areas from the Hephthalites and other “Turks / Huns” at least temporarily because Bahrām’s subsequent operations were clearly meant to establish control over the other portions of the Silk Road and Spice Roads. Thanks to his personal military skills Bahrām had now reconquered most of the territories lost in Khurasan in the last quarter of the fourth century.

The later Muslim sources unanimously state that under Bahrām V Gōr the importance of mounted archery grew among the Persians. The reason for the temporary decline in the importance of archery was the increasing use of armour by the Persians resulting from the military reforms of Šāpur II.⁵¹ The archery treatises state that Bahrām Gōr invented his own grasping technique of the bow⁵² and lock and also advocated the use of his own particular archery techniques.⁵³

There is very interesting piece of evidence for the development of archery techniques among the Persians and ‘Turks’ in *the Arab Archery* (124-5). According to this treatise, when the Persians defeated the ‘Turks’ as a result of their accurate marksmanship, the ‘Turks’ invented a layered shield in which the different layers resembled the scales of a fish. It was thanks to this that the ‘Turks’ were able to defeat the Persians. When this happened the Persians in their turn developed a new archery technique in which they adopted the use of the oblique shooting method with the outside aiming technique so that they could lengthen the arrow to increase the penetrative power. Since the old and young were unable to use this technique because it demanded great strength from the user, the Persians invented the hollow arrow guide for these weaklings so that they were able to achieve the same penetrative power as the mature men. According to *the Arab Archery*, it was thanks to the new shooting technique and arrow guide that the Persians then defeated the ‘Turks’ by being able to shoot through their shields and armour. In addition to this, the Persians also developed the method of shooting stone balls, long iron needles and iron missiles with the arrow-guide.

On the basis of the above information, it is not possible to date the invention of these techniques accurately, but fortunately there exists one important and overlooked piece of evidence in *the Saracen Archery*⁵⁴ which states in the context of describing the outside and inside aiming that Bahrām V Gōr knew both versions even if he may have called those differently from the author’s own understanding. When one remembers that the sources credit to Bahrām the new increased importance of archery in warfare with this piece of

⁵¹ See SYVÄNNE (2015a). For archery during the reigns of Ardašīr and Šāpur, see: *l’archerie musulmane ...*, p. 46 - 47 (archery fell into decline after Ardašīr and Šāpur); Hajiabad Inscription praising Šāpur’s archery skills (available at Sasanika); BIVAR (1972) 284; *Saracen Archery*, pp. 37 - 39, p. 200.

⁵² There exist also differences between so called “Sasanian bow”, “Parthian bow” or the “Scythian bow” see: KHUDIAKOV Yu. S. (1993) 109 - 118; NIKONOROV V.P. (1997) 52 - 53.

⁵³ *Saracen Archery*, pp. 37, 39, 46, 52 - 53, 59.

⁵⁴ *Saracen Archery*, p. 59.

evidence, it becomes probable that Bahrām had invented these counter measures against the Turks. This in turn means that it is probable that the ‘Turks’ in question were the Hephthalites who had adopted the use of the shield in the late 410s so that they were able to defeat the Persians in about 422-3, or alternatively that the Turks in question were the Kidarites who had clearly conquered East of Persia with Sind by the 420s. The latter actually appears likelier, because Tabari’s account doesn’t suggest any importance for archery in the context of the war against the ‘Turks’ of the Khagan who was defeated with a surprise attack while against the unknown enemies of the Indian ruler he does note the importance of archery.

The effectiveness of the archery naturally depended on the type, construction and quality of bows and arrows and on the physical characteristics of each archer, but in spite of this one can still detect a change in the way how the Persians fought under Bahrām. It is obvious that the Persians did not altogether abandon their traditional shower archery which would still have been used when deemed advantageous, but all the same there exists enough evidence to suggest that Bahrām stressed the power to penetrate enemy armor with powerful archery and the speed of movement over the more traditional slow moving or stationary tactics based on the use of shower archery. It was the oblique shooting technique, Bahrām’s lock and arrow-guides that made this possible. The increased importance and effectiveness of the Persian archery techniques would obviously have also bearing on the ‘Western Front’ against the Romans who would subsequently face much more effective Persian archery barrage in terms of its ability to penetrate Roman shields and armour than previously. Whether this made any difference in practice is not known, because the Romans feared in particular the effects of the shower archery which sacrificed penetrative power to sheer quantity of arrows shot. Furthermore, by the time the Romans and Persians fought against each other next time in earnest, the Persians appear to have reverted back to the use of shower archery at least when they faced the Romans. Perhaps, the best educated guess is that from this date onwards the Persians simply chose the best archery tactic to the situation: 1) against the heavily armoured opponents the power archery; 2) against the less heavily armoured opponents the shower archery. It is unfortunate that we do not know whether the Arabs of Hira had played any role in the development of this more powerful archery technique, but this seems probable in light of the fact that Bahrām had been schooled in archery and horsemanship by them.⁵⁵

According to Tabari’s⁵⁶ garbled account, after having returned to Ctesiphon, Bahrām made Mihr-Narseh *wuzurg framādār* (Supreme-Vizier), which made him the most important man right after the *Šāhānšāh*, while he himself (i.e. Bahrām) went to India disguised as Persian nobleman refugee. It is possible that Bahrām thought that he would not need to fear Mihr-Narseh because Mihr-Narseh had proved incompetent as military commander. Bahrām was justifiably famous for his hunting, womanizing, banqueting and

⁵⁵ Tabari I.856.

⁵⁶ Tabari I.866ff.

personal bravery in combat, but he found the day to day administration of the empire just too boring and was therefore quite willing to leave that to others.⁵⁷

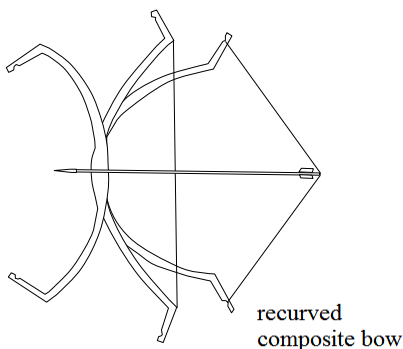
However, the Armenian sources prove that before Bahrām could start his Indian adventure, he was forced to deal with a crisis in Armenia in about 428. According to the Armenian sources (Moses and Lazar), the Armenian nobility had become disgusted with the womanizing of their king Ardašīr – the furious cuckolds sought justice. Ardašīr was also accused to have been a paedophile. It is no wonder that the Armenian nobles wanted to get rid of him. It is actually quite possible that Bahrām had appointed Ardašīr as King of Armenia precisely because he knew that it would not take long for his subjects to grow tired of him and ask the Persian *Šāhānšāh* to intervene. The nobles decided to ask Bahrām to depose Ardašīr and asked the Patriarch Sahak the Great to raise the complaint. Sahak, however, refused and stated that they should endure the faults of their king until they could find an acceptable solution with the Roman Emperor Theodosius II and not hand their Christian king to be judged by a fire-worshipper. This proves that the agreement between Rome and Persia in 422 had included some clause to the effect that Armenia was to retain some form of autonomy. The angry nobles, however, could not be calmed down and they approached the Persian king. They accused that Ardašīr and Sahak were both working for the Romans and asked that they both be deposed. Both were duly summoned to the court, but Bahrām decided to attempt to seduce Sahak to his side with the help of the Suren Pahlav (who was relative of Sahak and possibly none other than Mihr-Narseh), but to no avail. Bahrām, however, was unwilling to let the opportunity to take full control of Armenia pass by and deposed both Ardašīr and Sahak. Thereby the Armenian nobles had overthrown their own king and had handed over to the Persians their lands. Bahrām appointed Persian Vēh -Mihr- Šāpur as *marzpan* of Armenia and nominated Surmak as Archbishop of Armenia. The extant sources record a Roman embassy led by Dionysius to Persia at about this time, which must be connected with the Armenian situation.⁵⁸ It is probable that the Romans voiced a complaint, but the subsequent events prove that they were ready to accept the fait accompli – after all it had been brought about by the Armenian princes themselves. As I note in my *A Late Roman Military History Volume 1*, the sexual behaviour of the rulers can cause great political upheavals.

The political situation in Armenia remained volatile. The new Archbishop Surmak was expelled from his position after one year after which the princes asked Bahrām to give them a new one. Bahrām acted devilishly and gave the Armenians a Syrian Archbishop. The Syrian bishop and his companions came with women and lived in a manner that caused the princes to demand his deposition in 430 or 431 or 432. Half of the princes wanted another Armenian as Archbishop, while the other half demanded the return of Sahak. It was at this juncture that the Romans intervened. The *magister militum per Orientem* Anatolius sent from Theodosiopolis (Erzurum/Karin) an Armenian called Havuk as ambassador to Bahrām with the message to send Sahak to the Roman sector, if he didn't want to appoint him as

⁵⁷ See the descriptions of the lifestyle of Bahrām in: Tabari, al-Tha'alibi, Ferdowsi, and DARYAEE (2009) 23.

⁵⁸ PLRE2

Archbishop in Persarmenia. The fact that Anatolius was in Theodosiopolis suggests that the

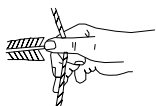


The Persians employed a great variety of different re-curved composite bows (short Scythian/Alan, long Parthian / “Sasanian”, asymmetric long “Hunnic”). The names of the bows are misleading as all of the above-mentioned models were in use from the 2nd century BC onwards in Iran. The Persians also used a great variety of different locks / releases. The locks shown here are only a small sample of the different locks in use. The usual mistake is to assume that the thumb-lock would have allowed more powerful shots with the bow or that it would have been impossible to use shower archery with the Mediterranean Release. The Mediterranean Release was equally suited to both even if each of the different locks had its own benefits and drawbacks. In fact, the thumb locks shown far left were weaker than the Mediterranean lock. The archers had to use different releases, arrows and types of bows according to their physical characteristics (height, length of arm and fingers) and type of armour and helmet worn and the great variety of bows and releases made this possible. Note the similarity between Bahram’s Lock and Mongolian release both of which clearly stressed the importance of power over speed.

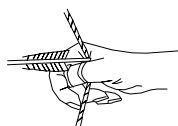
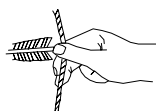
examples of different releases used in antiquity



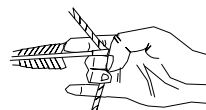
Mediterranean Release / Lock



Mongolian Release / Lock



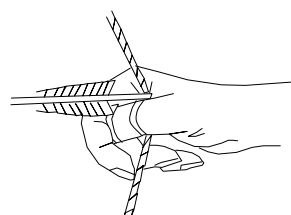
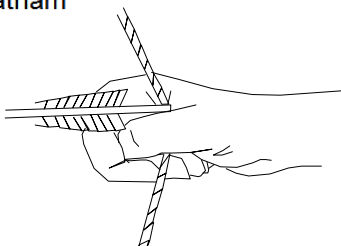
“Sasanian Lock”



Bahram's Lock according to Latham

© Dr. Ilkka Syvanne 2014

Mongolian Release / Lock



Romans had concentrated their army there in readiness to intervene in Persarmenia or at least to put pressure on the Persians. Bahrām agreed to a compromise. He set Sahak free, but appointed another Syrian as Archbishop. According to Moses,⁵⁹ Sahak demanded that Bahrām should rule Armenia by respecting its customs which also included the hereditary rights of the noble houses. Bahrām accepted Sahak’s demands and gave back to Sahak’s grandson (and the previous leader of the revolt) and the *sparapet* Vardan the family possessions of the Mamikonean house and then sent him back to Armenia.⁶⁰ Despite being released Sahak did not go to the Roman Armenia, but remained in retirement at Bagravand in Ayrarat until his death in 439. It seems probable that the readiness of Bahrām to grant back to Vardan his family property and the position of *sparapet* as well as the setting free of Sahak had resulted from the pressure put on Persians by the Romans. The building of Theodosiopolis/Karin proved its worth once again.

Tabari claims that when Bahrām reached India in disguise, he was appointed as military commander by the Indian ruler (presumably by one of the Guptas) in which capacity he defeated the enemy threatening the Indian ruler. According to Tabari⁶¹: “When the two armies encountered each other, Bahrām said to the Indian cavalymen (*asawirah* = *asavaran/savaran*) ‘Protect my rear’, and then he led an assault on the enemy. He began to strike their heads with blows that split the head down to the mouth; to strike another in mid-body so that he cut him in half; to go up to an elephant and sever its trunk with his sword; and to sweep a rider off his saddle. The Indians are a people who are not very skilful in archery, and most of them fought on foot, not having horses, when, on the other hand, Bahrām shot an arrow at one of the enemy, the shaft penetrated right through him. When the enemy saw what was happening, they wheeled round and fled, without turning aside to do anything.” This account suggests several things. Firstly, it shows Bahrām using two cavalry lines. Secondly, it demonstrates his readiness to charge to the close quarters and use sword. Thirdly, it demonstrates the great power of his archery shots, which increases the probability that Bahrām did improve the effectiveness of the Sasanian archery in the manner described above. Taken together it seems probable that Bahrām introduced elements of Arabic cavalry tactics into the Persian system so that the first cavalry line was expected to charge at a gallop straight at the enemy in its entirety while using powerful archery shots after which they would engage the enemy at close quarters. Notably this very same tactic was later used by Pērōz against the Hephthalites, but with much poorer results. This was a clear departure away from the more careful and cautious tactics followed by the Persians for example against the Romans during the fourth century.

Tabari claims that the Indian ruler rewarded Bahrām for his services by giving him the hand of his daughter in marriage together with the city of al-Daybul, and the provinces of Makran and the adjacent parts of Sind all of which were to be added to the Persian lands. It is quite clear that this confused account refers to a real war in which Bahrām had concluded an alliance with the Guptas against the Sinds and Kidarites, and that the alliance

⁵⁹ Moses Khorenatsi, p.344.

⁶⁰ e.g. Vardan Arewelci, p. 169; Stephen of Taron, p. 55; Stephen of Taron, p. 30.

⁶¹ Tabari I.868 (tr. by BOSWORTH, pp. 101 - 102).

had been sealed with a marriage pact and land. In this context it is important to note that Tabari states that the areas in question were added to the Persian territory (!) – all of this would have been quite out of context if Bahrām would have really been an exile in disguise (as claimed by Tabari) and not the ruler of Persia.

The territories that the Indian ruler handed to Bahrām were of utmost importance for the control of the trade routes from China and Central Asia. The port city of al-Daybul (possibly to be identified with Bhanbore, but exact location is still unknown except that it lay to the west of Indus' main channel) was particularly important in this respect. We do not know how long the conquest of these territories lasted, but one may hazard a guess of perhaps from about 430/31 to 433/34.

While Bahrām was busy fighting and enlarging his realm, the new *wuzurg framādār* Mihr-Narseh amassed all important positions of the state into his own family. Mihr-Narseh placed his son Zurwāndād in charge of religion and religious law by making him chief *herbed* (*hērbedān herbed*). In this capacity, as chief of the religious police, Zurvandad was able to act as his father's eyes and ears. The fact that Mihr-Narseh had named his son Zurvandad (the name means "created by Zurvan") suggests that Mihr-Narseh followed an esoteric version of Zoroastrian faith according to which Zurvan was the supreme god who had created both Ohrmazd and Ahriman. It was this version of Zoroastrianism which was called as Zurvanism (notably the Manicheans followed similar religious doctrine) that Mihr-Narseh promoted both in Persia and then later also in Armenia. Mihr-Narseh placed his second son Māhgušnasp in charge of the land taxes by making him the head of the cultivators/peasants as *wāstaryōšān salar*. To complete the set, Mihr-Narseh appointed Kārdār, his third son, as supreme commander of the armed forces (and/or military caste) with the title *artēštārān salar*. This concentration of power in the hands of one family was to have its consequences for the *Šāhānšāh*.⁶²

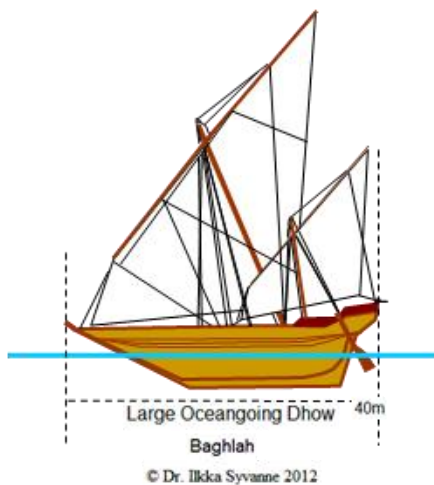
After Bahrām had returned from his Indian campaign, he immediately set about to secure the western portions of the Indian trade route by attacking Yemen and even the horn of Africa and East Africa if we are to believe Tabari.⁶³ The fact that the attack was conducted also against the Horn of Africa suggests that the target was Aksum and its clients. Contrary to what Bosworth⁶⁴ and many others state, this story is not to be considered to be a legend, but to reflect very real Persian operations in the area. Indeed, Bahrām's campaign appears to have been a great success, because he is said to have inflicted large numbers of casualties and is said to have taken plentiful numbers of captives before he returned back. The most logical reason for this campaign would of course have been to wrest control of the trade route from the East Romans so that the Persians could obtain greater profit from the international trade between the West (including Arabia and East Africa) and East (Persia, India, China), but this is not necessarily so (see below). However, if Bahrām's intention was to take control of the trade route from the Romans there would be several things that would

⁶² Tabari I.868 - 9; POURSHARIATI (2008) 62 - 65; DARYAEE (2009) 23.

⁶³ Tabari I.871.

⁶⁴ BOSWORTH (p. 106, n. 272)

lend support to this. Firstly, the East Roman fleet, especially the Alexandrian Fleet, would have been tied up in the defence of North Africa against the Vandals at least from 431 until 435 and it is probable that detachments from the Alexandrian Fleet were posted in Carthage even after that. This in its turn would have meant that the Aksumites and Yemenites could not hope to receive any help from the Romans even if the latter would have wanted to intervene against the Persians. Secondly, there exists clear evidence to suggest that the Aksumites lost temporarily control of Yemen probably in the 430s, which they regained probably in the 450s.⁶⁵

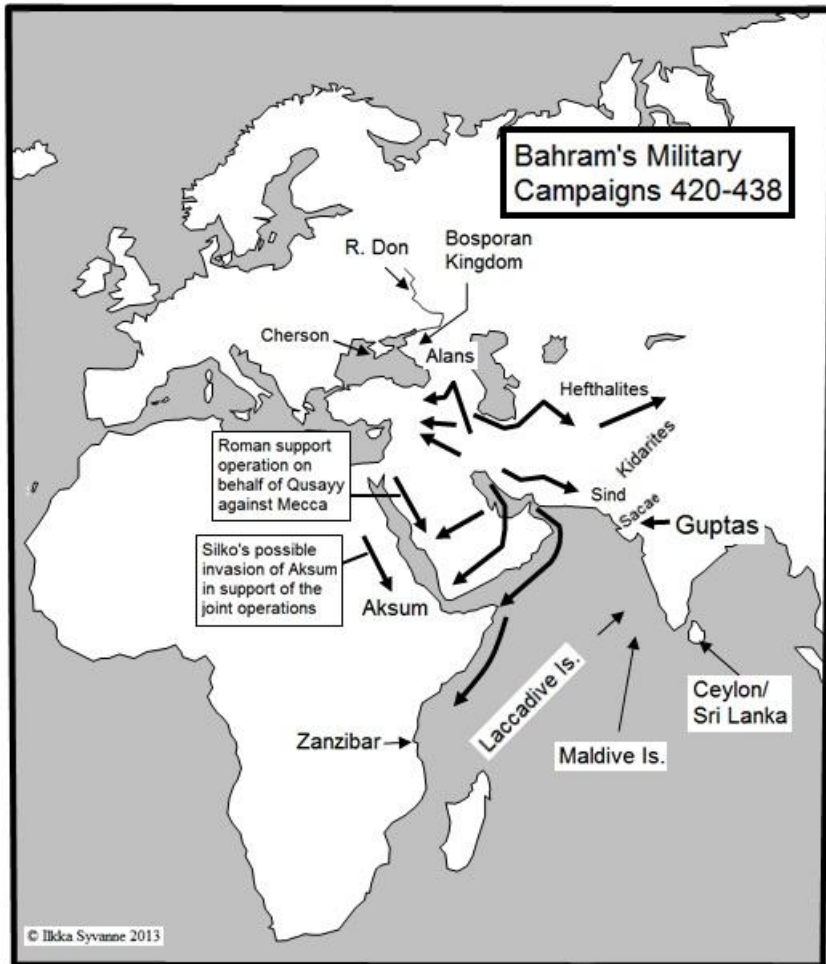


However, there is also another possibility, which is that Bahrām and the Romans actually conducted a joint operation against the Yemenites and Aksumites, if one dates the campaign of Qusayy with the support of the Roman ‘Caesar’ against the city of Mecca to the same time period. Qusayy was an ancestor of the Prophet Muhammad. He was born in Mecca, but his father died soon after that. His mother remarried a man from the tribe of Udra. As a result of this, Qusayy spent his youth among the Udra near the Roman border. According to the Arabic tradition, Qusayy marched to Mecca and fought against the southern Arabic tribe of the Khuzaa and with the assistance of Caesar overthrew them. After this, he gathered together the clans of Quraysh and settled them in and around Mecca, restored the ‘religion of Abraham’, and rebuilt the Kaba and thereby assured the supremacy of Mecca as a place of worship. Since it is known that Qusayy was a contemporary of al-Mundhir, it is clear that this event could have taken place at any time between about 405 and 434.⁶⁶ On the basis of this it would be possible to date the war against Mecca for example to the immediate aftermath of the Berber and Arab invasion of the Roman East in 410, or to coincide with the Persian War of 421-422. However, in my opinion the likeliest date would be the period 434-437 for the same reasons as stated above. It is quite possible that the Aksumites had hindered the maritime trade between East and West by demanding exorbitant

⁶⁵ SYVÄNNE (2016).

⁶⁶ See SHAHID (1989). See also footnote 4 above.

customs duties, and that it would have been in the interest of both Rome and Persia to restore the previous status quo by crushing the Aksumite power. Since the Vandal threat preoccupied the Roman fleets, the Romans could have asked Bahrām to assist by invading Yemen and Horn of Africa while the Roman army consisting mostly of the Arabic *foederati* (esp. of the Udra and Salihids) would advance along the coastal caravan routes against Mecca and its southern Arabic occupiers (who must have been subjects of Himyar and



thereby subjects of Aksum). Additional support for this dating comes from Theodoret's *Curatio*, which names the Ethiopians (Aksumites), the innumerable tribes of the Ishmaelites (Arabs), the Sanni (Tzani), the Abasgi, and the other barbarians among the Roman client states, if it is dated to the year 437.⁶⁷ It is clear that the Aksumites would not have been clients of Rome immediately after the invasion of their territory unless Bahrām had acted as an ally of Rome. It is also possible that the Nubian federate King Silko coordinated his actions against the Ethiopians on behalf of the Romans at the same time as Bahrām

⁶⁷ as SHAHID does in (1989).

advanced there from another direction. In fact, it is possible that one of the reasons for Bahrām's subsequent assassination could have been his cooperation with the Romans.

Bahrām's military campaigns in Yemen, Horn of Africa and East Africa suggest that he had rebuilt the Persian navy and had probably obtained additional naval assets from Sind with which he was able to change the balance of power in the region until the 450s. It is quite probable that Bahrām's Arabian upbringing played a role in the importance that Bahrām attached to the control of trade routes. It is also clear that modern historians have underestimated the naval capabilities of the Persian Empire. This false image has resulted from the fact that the Persian dhows were unable to engage the Roman war galleys on equal terms, but immediately after the Romans could not post these ships on the Red Sea the Persians were there reasserting their own dominance in the region.

When the victorious Bahrām returned from Yemen back to home, he appears to have concentrated on easy living until his untimely death in about 438. According to Tabari and other sources, when Bahrām chased a wild ass / onager in Media (the favourite hunting ground of his and the domain of the Mihran family), he fell to a pit or swamp or quicksand and sank into the mud and was never found. This sounds like a murder which was covered up. According to Kaveh Farrokh,⁶⁸ the Iran Archaeological Society may have found even evidence to prove the murder.

Nizam al-Mulk⁶⁹ has preserved an interesting account of the actions of a vizier/wazir called Rast-Ravishn ('Right-Conduct') for the reign of Bahrām Gōr. According to him, Bahrām Gōr trusted his vizier blindly and would not listen to any word against him. He left the ruling of the realm entirely in the hands of this vizier while he himself spent his days and nights in entertainment, hunting and drinking. However, then Bahrām received news that some enemy rose against him, which roused him to action. Consequently, Bahrām went into the treasury to obtain money and supplies for the troops that he intended to dispatch against the invaders, but found the treasury empty. When he questioned the staff about the situation and whereabouts of several nobles no-one dared to say anything.

Bahrām sacked the vizier so that the people would not fear to speak out. It was then that Bahrām learnt that Rast-Ravishn and his associates were corrupt to the bone: They had imprisoned persons and then released them in return for bribes; they had stolen property with false accusations; and they had killed and imprisoned people only to obtain their property. The end result of all this had been that many of the nobles had fled and the state treasury was empty. Of the over 700 prisoners questioned only 20 were murderers, thieves and criminals, all the rest were victims of 'Right-Conduct'. In addition to this, the inspectors found incriminating evidence in the form of letters in which Rast-Ravishn encouraged a foreign ruler to invade. 'Right-Conduct' stated that he had won over several officers, had left most of the troops without provisions or equipment and had made the country poor so that the foreign ruler could invade. According to this account, Bahrām hanged

⁶⁸ FARROKH (2007).

⁶⁹ Nizam al-Mulk, p.24ff.

Right-Conduct’ and removed all his creatures from office. The foreign ruler, who had exchanged letters with ‘Right-Conduct’, sent gifts to Bahrām and managed to obtain pardon.

The problem with this account is of course that we do not know that Bahrām would have had any vizier/hazarbed named Rast-Ravishn whom he would have then executed. Therefore, it is possible that the whole account is a fabrication or that Nizam has confused two Bahrāms with each other. However, in my opinion it is probable that there is a germ of truth behind the story. Since Nizam’s purpose was to write instructions on good governance, it is probable that Nizam altered the story to suit his purpose. It is quite possible that he hid Mihr-Narseh behind the pseudonym of Rast-Ravishn (‘Good-Conduct’) and then claimed that Bahrām had been able to overcome his corrupt Prime Minister instead of having been assassinated by him. The story would hardly have been educational if the criminal killed the ruler. There are two things that suggest this. Firstly and most importantly, we know that Bahrām’s successor Yazdgerd II suffered from chronic lack of money (which made it necessary for him to extort money and help from the Romans in 440-441), despite the fact that Bahrām had achieved great victories and had brought plenty of booty and had conquered great tracts of land which gave him control over the international trade routes from East to West – only the existence of a corrupt Prime Minister can explain why the state coffers were empty in such a situation. Secondly, Mihr-Narseh continued to hold on to his offices under Yazdgerd II, which makes it probable, that Mihr-Narseh had raised him on the throne. If Mihr-Narseh had indeed been in communication with some foreign ruler, his goal had undoubtedly been to force Bahrām to march against him so that he could continue his corrupt practices uninterrupted without having to fear the possibility of exposure when the ruler was holding court.

6. Bahrām’s Legacy

Bahrām’s legacy was complex. He had increased the effectiveness of the Persian mounted archery and he had reconquered the territories lost in the last quarter of the fourth century and had conquered vast tracts of land previously held only during the third century, which had given him control over the trade networks from East to West. He had also improved the efficiency of the navy to a level which it would attain again only in the reign of Xusrō II. He may also have restored the status quo in Yemen and Horn of Africa on behalf of Rome, or alternatively he took control of these areas while still acting officially as an ally of Rome.

On the other hand, Bahrām had allowed the corrupt religious bigot Mihr-Narseh to grow too powerful with the result that the state coffers were empty, which in turn meant that at the time of Bahrām’s death the effectiveness of the Persian army suffered from the lack of provisions and equipment, which the Persians needed compensate for by extorting money with the threat of war from the East Romans so that they would be able to finance their eastern campaigns caused by Mihr-Narseh. This last mentioned was to become one of the standard operating procedures for the Persians whenever they suffered from lack of money. The Romans were so wealthy that the yearly income of a single wealthy senatorial family would have been enough to pay all the money extorted by Attila or by the Persians.

However, the Roman upper classes paid practically no taxes and were quite unwilling to pay any extra taxes to maintain the armed forces on top of which the Romans considered it beneath their dignity to pay anything to the foreigners in return for peace. This ensured a situation in which the Romans would always fight first before they would agree to make any payments to the Persians, and it also ensured the fall of West Rome.

As regards Mihr-Narseh, he was undoubtedly able to convince himself like most religious or political leaders that he had acted for the good of his religion and state, because he built several villages and fire-temples to commemorate his family's devotion to the gods, and because he directed his rulers towards strict observance of the Zoroastrian doctrine favoured by him, and because he instigated wars against the infidels. This in turn was to cause plenty of turmoil in the frontiers facing the Romans and Central Asian nomads.

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Summary

The article reconstructs the military history of Persia under a Bahrām V Gōr, and points out the historical significance of his reign and campaigns as well as the importance of his military reforms – in particular the importance of the adoption of the new style of archery and cavalry tactics.

Keywords: Sasanian Warfare, Military History, Sasanian Army, Late Antiquity, Archery