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Jacob Neusner

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A HISTORY OF THE JEWS  
IN BABYLONIA

II. The Early Sasanian Period

by

Jacob Neusner

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*For Suzanne*



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## PREFACE

No brief period in Jewish history so permanently impressed its mark upon all subsequent ages as did the four decades under study. Every aspect of Jewish cultural and religious life, the conduct of civil affairs in the diaspora, the formulation of political policy both within the Jewish community and toward the outside world, the elaboration of theological, historical, and biblical motifs—all continue to reveal the enduring imprint of these years. And if this is so, the reason must be found in the towering personalities of Rav and Samuel, who form the center of interest in the history of this period, and the abiding importance of whose achievements renders it consequential for succeeding generations. Ismar Elbogen noted that the influence of Rav and Samuel may be discerned upon every page of the Jewish prayerbook. The same may be said of many another central institution and idea of Judaism. These two men provide, therefore, the chief foci around which our study centers. At the same time, I must emphasize that we shall by no means exhaust all aspects of their legacy, or even note everything of interest in it. My effort is to provide more than a joint biography of two important men, but rather, through a study of their sayings and those of their adult contemporaries,<sup>1</sup> to recover some clear, sequential, and well-organized ideas about the history of Babylonian Jewry and Judaism in this age. We have a number of biographical studies of both men, including those by David Hoffman, Y. S. Zuri, and others of lesser value. We even have a full compendium of Rav's sayings, compiled by Berthold Jeiteles. The structure of the literary remains of the period was revealed in the researches of both classical Talmudic commentators, and such modern scholars as Y. N. Epstein, H. Albeck, S. Lieberman, and others. Many have contributed to the study of law, philology, and literature of the early 'Amora'im. Apart from rather brief, superficial, and methodologically unsophisticated works, however, we do not have *history*. And that is what I propose to provide.

Two major themes, one external, the other internal, dominate Babylonian Jewish history in the period of the first two Sasanian emperors (226-272). Ardashir brought to an end a fortunate time in Jewry's life,

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<sup>1</sup> I am postponing study of sources relevant to the students of Rav and Samuel to Volume III, which will be devoted to the period from ca. 265 to ca. 300, except for those sayings clearly to be dated during the lifetimes of the first Babylonian 'Amora'im, or directly pertinent to their affairs.

and the Jews dreaded the new and far less accommodating rulers who had overthrown the Parthians. Jewish leaders consequently had to find a new basis for their community's politics, to explain to the people exactly what the cataclysmic events meant within the framework of redemption, and to respond to the rich ferment in regional cultural and religious life characteristic of this period. An equally significant event was the great expansion of the rabbinic movement in Babylonia, marked by the return from Palestine of Rav, Levi ben Sisi, and other teachers, the foundation of new academies, and the application to Babylonian Jewish affairs of the Mishnah of Rabbi Judah the Prince.

The first three chapters focus upon the first, external challenge, that of political events, and religious responses to them. The third chapter forms a transition, for, as we shall see, the exilarch was strengthened, in his quest for a new political basis for existence by the services of well-trained judges, teachers, and lawyers, who constituted at the same time the core of the rabbinic movement. Chapters Four, Five, and Six concentrate on religious and cultural matters, specifically, the nature of rabbinic leadership, theology, and Scriptural commentary. Since Bible study played a substantial part in rabbinic Judaism, a detailed survey of exegetical literature is provided in Chapter Six. The final two chapters are concerned with sociological questions, in particular the character of Babylonian Jewry, its population, and the ways in which society was influenced by the rabbis' traditions and laws. The impact of political history upon rabbinic Judaism is further discussed in Chapter Five, sections ii and vi, Chapter Six, section vii, and Chapter Eight, section vi. The relationship between the law and popular practice is additionally treated in Chapter Two, section vii, Chapter Three, sections v, vi, and vii; Chapter Four, sections ii and iv, and Chapter Five, sections iv and v.

The period at hand forms a perfectly natural division in both Jewish and Iranian history. The rise of the Sasanians under Ardashir, and the consolidation of their power by Shapur, both strong emperors, represent the first and most glorious chapter in their history. Shapur's successors, a series of weak emperors until Shapur II, merely maintained, as best they could, the legacy of the first two rulers. Rav and Samuel, similarly, stand by themselves. Their students and heirs spent many decades studying, preserving, and realizing the legacy of the first generation of Amoraim.

In volume I of this study, I was forced, by the paucity of sources dealing with both Babylonian Jews and Parthians, to offer numerous

conjectures and hypotheses based upon limited evidence. Here the problem is the very opposite. We have extensive primary literature dealing with aspects of Jewish culture. For Sasanian Iran, archaeological and numismatic evidence now supplements a relatively rich and well-established literary-historical tradition, rather than constituting almost the whole of historical evidence (apart from the classical histories) as it does for the Parthian period. If the first volume relied far too much on the augmentative, but never certain, resources of the historical imagination, the second required the exercise of the faculty to select and discriminate, to select important problems, and to discriminate in favor of subjects heretofore neglected or only partially studied. Little will be achieved by detailed rehearsals of well-known facts of Sasanian history, chronology, culture, religion, and politics. I am not qualified to enter the much-vexed problems of that history, being mainly interested in it for its capacity to illumine Jewish affairs. In Chapter One I have tried, as before, to offer a modest summary of the accepted facts of Iranian history and culture, with references provided for those interested in further pursuing these matters. I have not, however, offered an opinion on such matters as, e.g., the chronology of Shapur's wars, or cast an uninvited, and never to be counted, ballot on the scholarly issues inhering in the study of third century Mazdaism, the work of Tosar and Kartir in establishing the state-church, the history of Zurvanism, or similar matters. I believe the Jewish sources may illumine many problems in Sasanian studies, just as these studies offer fundamental information for Babylonian Jewish history. In this work, nonetheless, only Jewish history is at issue.

Jewish history in this period has been much discussed, yet, as I said, I do not believe we have an adequate, detailed, and informed account of it. What we have, and what I depend upon, are mainly literary and legal studies of Babylonian-Talmudic matters, but these are not meant as history, and certainly they are not. Issues most commonly discussed pertain to the later history in Babylonia of the Mishnah, Tosefta, and other Tannaitic documents, to the state of Jewish academies and law in the early Amoraic period, and to the exposition of Talmudic materials *in situ*. Literary and legal scholars do not provide sequential and well-organized historical information, though their commentaries contribute greatly toward its recovery. For my part, I must emphasize that this work is not intended as either legal or literary history. The reader interested in literary aspects of the Talmudic sources should look elsewhere, beginning in such works as Y. N. Epstein's *Introductions to*

*Amoraic Literature* (in Hebrew, Jerusalem, 1962), and his *Introduction to the Text of the Mishnah* (in Hebrew 2nd ed., Jerusalem, 1964), H. Albeck's *Introduction to the Mishnah* (in Hebrew, Jerusalem, 1959), A. Weiss's various works, listed in the bibliography, on the literary history of the Talmud, the monumental commentaries of L. Ginzberg and S. Lieberman on the Palestinian Talmud, and, of S. Lieberman, on the Tosefta, and similar studies. Moreover, this is not legal history, nor could a history of Jewish law be composed on such a narrow chronological and geographical basis as one small region and half of a single century. It is possible that legal historians may find useful some of the suggestions on cultural and social history which are offered here, but in no case have I attempted to reduce complex legal questions to sociological, political, or extrinsic, cultural terms unless the 'Amora'im themselves did so. If therefore the reader is looking for novellae on issues of literary or legal interpretation of the Babylonian Talmud, he will be disappointed in the pages that follow. Here the Babylonian Talmud and other relevant sources are being read from the perspective of the history of political, social, and cultural-religious realities, and not, except as part of that history, of law or literature, however penetrating such perspectives may be. On the other hand, one very important question is, To what degree did the law actually describe the life of the people? What impact did the legal and ethical dicta of Rav, Samuel, and their fellow Amoraim make upon popular affairs? To answer these questions, I have had to pay close attention to the evidences of the enforcement of Jewish law, and to the influence of that law upon Jewish life and society.

One of the chief difficulties in using essentially legal and exegetical texts for historical purposes is the necessity to break the natural continuities which the texts exhibit in the original. The sayings of Rav and Samuel most commonly are preserved within the framework of fundamentally scholastic, dialectical discussions. That framework did not originate with Rav and Samuel, who engaged mainly in *ad hoc* exposition of law and doctrine, but, as I shall argue in a subsequent volume, with the generation of Rabbah, Rava, and Abaye, who, having exhausted the hermeneutical possibilities of inherited tradition, struck out in bold, new directions indicated by their own dialectical genius. The fact is that many of the sayings of Rav and Samuel are preserved in utterly non-historical settings. The result is that one uses them for historical purposes only by violently detaching them from their legal

context, or by diverting attention from the history of their age to the history of law, neither a desirable alternative.

A second major problem, likewise not satisfactorily solved here, is posed by the need to assess the reliability of historical information provided by the Talmud. The texts which preserve this information were finally edited about two and a half centuries later, and though it is likely that notes, and even brief, organized tractates, existed before that time, we have no way of knowing how accurately the actual words of the rabbis were reported in the final recension. At first I had assumed that the one solid rock upon which to build was the sayings ascribed to the sages. A number of stories explicitly state however that the words of Rav or Samuel, cited in a clear-cut legal formula, were not actually said by them at all, but were rather formulated in their names by students who, observing their actions, presumed to generalize on such a basis, and to offer what they thought was the master's abstract, legal opinion. If this is so in several cases, as it is, one cannot be certain how much else is, in fact, pseudepigraphic. I cannot offer a general law for verifying the reliability of Talmudic materials, although my assumption is that legal dicta were actually stated by the rabbis to whom they are credited unless contrary evidence denies it. I have come to a number of *ad hoc* decisions. If one has no final certainties, that is what makes research interesting.

It will be useful for the reader to know the chief scholarly influences upon my research. Among the Iranists, I have relied upon the judgment, both written and oral, of my teacher Richard N. Frye, and upon that, generously given when solicited, of W. B. Henning, upon the philological studies of Teleghi, both Geigers, Kohut, de Menasce, Henning, and others; upon the historical and religious-cultural insights of Geo Widengren, the only Iranist to make a direct contribution to our subject; and upon other studies cited where relevant. The works most commonly cited on Babylonian Jewish matters are those of Funk and Obermeyer. Obermeyer's geographical researches are universally and rightly accepted as the foundation for all study, superseding all their predecessors and never themselves rendered obsolete. The pioneer work of Babylonian Talmudic history was S. Funk's *Die Juden in Babylonien* (Berlin 1902). Like Graetz, Funk had the merit of offering valid generalizations. But like Graetz, he covered the whole period too briefly. Graetz's brief chapter was adequate for his purposes. It is unfortunate that others have used it when in need of more than a very superficial summary. J. Newman's small volumes *Agricultural*

*Life of the Jews in Babylonia* and *Commercial Life* are likewise widely cited, particularly by Iranists, far more than their slender value would have warranted, while F. M. Heichelheim's economic survey has yet to receive requisite attention. The works of Yavetz and Halevi have continued to guide me in many ways, as did the several volumes on Talmudic history, and the biography of Rav, by Y. S. Zuri. Zuri's work has been unaccountably ignored by most recent students of Talmudic history, partly because of the prolix and repetitious manner of his presentation, partly because of the very uneven standard of his research. For this period, Zuri's work supersedes in usefulness that of Yavetz and Halevi. Halevi in particular was mainly intent upon demonstrating the antiquity of the Oral Torah in Babylonia, but having done so, he found relatively little of interest in the period under study. In specific matters it will be seen that his thought continued, as in volume I, to exert a strong influence upon my own. As earlier, I found the historical insights of J. H. Weiss vastly overrated, and those of S. Dubnow inconsequential. Samuel Krauss and A. Kohut provided research which had to be consulted at every step. Kohut's edition, with the supplements of Geiger and others, of the *Arukh* remains of value. Krauss's many articles and books on Talmudic archaeology and history likewise proved invariably fruitful. Among those now specializing in the history of the Talmudic period, M. Beer and Hugo Mantel have greatly enriched my knowledge and understanding through each of their several contributions, correspondence, and criticism of my work. I learned much from the unpublished doctoral dissertation (Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati, Library) of Professor Ezra Spicehandler. The relevant chapters and notes in the first two volumes of Salo Baron's *Social and Religious History of the Jews* offered important guidance. At specific points in the discussion, I shall, of course, cite many other works of great value. While this account by no means exhausts the collegial contributions to my research, as the notes, bibliography, and supplementary bibliography make abundantly evident, it will serve to indicate the scholarly context in which this work is intended to find a place.

Citations of Talmudic literature are included in the text, rather than in notes, to facilitate reading.

Most translations of Babylonian Talmudic texts follow those edited by Dr. I. Epstein, and those of Midrash Rabbah, that edited by Dr. H. Freedman and Maurice Simon, both published by the Soncino Press, London, in 1948 and 1939 respectively. Rabbi William Braude's trans-



lation of the Midrash on Psalms, published by Yale University Press, New Haven, in 1959, was followed throughout. While I have checked these translations against the original texts, and, where possible, against variant readings as well, and have altered some of them, in the main I have found it satisfactory to make use of the available translations, since this is not a work of philology, text-criticism, or commentary. Texts are here cited mainly for illustration, rather than extended analysis, except where relevant to a strictly historical question.

In the appendix, I have included corrections and additions to volume I.

Professor Richard N. Frye read and offered helpful comments on the first three chapters, and Professor Seymour Siegel did the same for the entire manuscript. Professors W. B. Henning, Saul Lieberman, and Morton Smith provided, in correspondence, invaluable comments. I am deeply grateful to these generous teachers for their continuing contributions to my research. Its failings are mine alone.

It is my pleasant task, also, to acknowledge gratefully the assistance of the following: Miss Linda Lutz, formerly Reference Librarian of Baker Library, Dartmouth College, who procured numerous books and articles otherwise unavailable to me; the Committee on Research of Dartmouth College, which made numerous grants, large and small, for research and typing expenses; the Penrose Fund of the American Philosophical Society, which supported parts of my research expense in the summer of 1965; Mrs. Margaret Sanders, secretary of the Departments of Philosophy and Religion at Dartmouth College, who typed part of the manuscript; and Dr. Lawrence Marwick, Head of the Hebraic Section of the Library of Congress, who provided important bibliographical assistance.

My thanks are due also to Professor Jes P. Asmussen, who gave helpful criticism on Iranian matters, and to Mr. David Goodblatt, who prepared the indices and assisted in reading and correcting proofs, and to whom I am indebted for valuable help in seeing the manuscript through the press.

To my wife, who has brought to fulfillment in my life the blessings described in Proverbs 31: 10-31, these pages are offered in homage.

JACOB NEUSNER

Hanover, New Hampshire  
25 Kislev 5726  
December 19th, 1965.



## CHRONOLOGY

### *I. Political Events in Early Sasanian Times: Foreign Policy*

- 229 – Ardashir demanded Alexander Severus return territories once ruled by the Achemenids.
- 231 – Attack of Alexander Severus.
- 232 – Romans repulsed, peace restored.
  - Xosroes assassinated, Ardashir conquered Armenia, Trdat son of Xosroes fled to Rome.
- 240 – Shapur crushed revolts in Armenia, took Hatra.
- 241 – Outbreak of First War with Rome against Philip the Arab.
  - Shapur attacked via Nisibis and Carrhae, Romans retook Carrhae and (according to their account) threatened Ctesiphon<sup>1</sup>.
- 244 – Peace of Shapur and Philip. Iran kept Armenia, Romans retook part of Mesopotamia.
  - Bactria entered direct relations with Rome.
- 256 – Outbreak of Second War with Rome. Shapur took Nisibis, Carrhae, Edessa, and Antioch. Valerian hastened east, retook Antioch.
- 260 – Valerian captured, Shapur put up his own candidate for the Roman throne against Macrianus and Gallienus, Miriades/Cyriades of Antioch. Shapur retook Antioch, installed his candidate as Caesar, invaded Cilicia and Cappadocia, took Tarsus, Cilicia Campestris, passes of the Taurus, besieged and took Caesarea Mazaca.
- 261/2 – Shapur returned home, checked at Emesa, and harried by Odenathus of Palmyra.
- 262-3 – Odenathus attacked Carrhae and Nisibis, drove down to gates of Ctesiphon, ravaged central Babylonia, and retired to Palmyra.
- 263-272 – Shapur occupied himself with construction of great works, including new city of Shapur, dike at Shuster, memorials at Hadji-Abad, Nakhš-i Radjab, Nakhš-i Rostam, and Darabgerd.
- 273 – Shapur died, succeeded by his son.

### *II. Jewish Aspects of Political Events*

- 226-242 – Jews lost their former political and religious autonomy, had to accommodate themselves to more vigorous rule, establish-

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<sup>1</sup> See Richard N. Frye, Review of Ensslin, *Zu den Kriegen*, *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 8, 1956, 103-106.

ment of state-cult, by Sasanians. R. Shila, R. Kahana, and Rav were unable to formulate realistic policy, and reconcile themselves to the change effected by the new regime.

- 242-263 – Samuel succeeded in reconciling the Jews to Persian rule, in alliance with the new emperor, Shapur I, who proclaimed a policy of cultural and religious toleration.
- 253-256 – Dura Jews supported Rome against Persian conquest.
- 260 – Samuel refused to lament the slaughter of Jews of Caesarea Mazaca by Shapur's army.
- 263 – Samuel's Daughters made captive, sent to Palestine for ransom, probably in siege and destruction of Nehardea by Palmyrene army. Samuel's academy destroyed.
- Ca. 272 – Reaction, led by Kartir, against Shapur's policy of toleration.

# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

## *I. Journals*

AJSL	= American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures
AO	= Acta Orientalia
ArcO	= Archiv Orientalni
BOR	= Babylonian and Oriental Record
BSOS	= Bulletin of the School of Oriental (and African) Studies
CAH	= Cambridge Ancient History
HUCA	= Hebrew Union College Annual
IA	= Iranica Antiqua
IEJ	= Israel Exploration Journal
JA	= Journal Asiatique
JaJGL	= Jahrbücher für Jüdische Geschichte und Literatur
JaJLG	= Jahrbuch der jüdisch. Literatur-Gesellschaft
JAOS	= Journal of the American Oriental Society
JBL	= Journal of Biblical Literature
JE	= Jewish Encyclopedia
JJS	= Journal of Jewish Studies
JNES	= Journal of Near Eastern Studies
JQR	= Jewish Quarterly Review
JR	= Journal of Religion
JRAS	= Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society
JSS	= Journal of Semitic Studies
MGWJ	= Monatschrift für die Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judenthums
MO	= Monde Oriental
MWJ	= Magazin für die Wissenschaft des Judenthums
PAAJR	= Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research
Pope	= A. U. Pope, <i>Survey of Persian Art</i> , N.Y. 1938, vol. I.
REJ	= Revue des Études Juives
RHR	= Revue de l'Histoire des Religions
RSO	= Revista degli Studi Orientali
ZDMG	= Zeitschrift der deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft
ZWN	= Zeitschrift für Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft

## *II. Talmudic Literature*

b.	= Babylonian Talmud	Mak.	= Makkot
y.	= Palestinian Talmud	Meg.	= Megillah
R.	= Rabbah	Men.	= Menahot
A.Z.	= 'Avodah Zarah	Ned.	= Nedarim
B.B.	= Bava Batra	Nid.	= Niddah
B.M.	= Bava Mezi'ah	Pes.	= Pesahim
B.Q.	= Bava Qamma	Qid.	= Qiddushin
Bekh.	= Bekhorot	R.H.	= Rosh Hashanah
Ber.	= Berakhot	Sanh.	= Sanhedrin
Bik.	= Bikkurim	Shab.	= Shabbat
'Eruv.	= 'Eruvin	Shev.	= Shevu'ot
Git.	= Gittin	SOZ	= Seder 'Olam Zuta
Hag.	= Hagigah	Suk.	= Sukkah
Hul.	= Hullin	Yev.	= Yevamot
Ket.	= Ketuvot	Zev.	= Zevahim
M.Q.	= Mo'ed Qatan		

## III. Biblical Books

Gen.	=	Genesis	Ezek.	=	Ezekiel
Ex.	=	Exodus	Ez.	=	Ezekiel
Lev.	=	Leviticus	Ps.	=	Psalms
Num.	=	Numbers	Prov.	=	Proverbs
Deut.	=	Deuteronomy	Song	=	Song of Songs
Jud.	=	Judges	Lam.	=	Lamentations
Sam.	=	Samuel	Koh.	=	Kohelet
Is.	=	Isaiah	Dan.	=	Daniel
Jer.	=	Jeremiah	Chron.	=	Chronicles
			Est.	=	Esther

## IV. Other Abbreviations

(N.B. Bibliographical data are given in the bibliography, Vol. I, 191-213, and in the Supplementary Bibliography, below, pp. 291-301).

Vol. I	=	A History of the Jews in Babylonia, I. The Parthian Period
<i>Life</i>	=	A Life of Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai
<i>Arukh</i>	=	Arukh HaShalem, ed. A. Kohut
Bacher, <i>Agada</i>	=	W. Bacher, Die Agada der babylonischen Amoräer
Christensen, <i>L'Iran</i>	=	A. Christensen, L'Iran sous les Sassanides
<i>Dik. Sof.</i>	=	R. Rabinovicz, Dikdukei Soferim, I-XV
Duchesne-Guillemin, <i>La Religion</i>	=	J. Duchesne-Guillemin, La Religion de l'Iran Ancien
Frye, <i>Heritage</i>	=	Richard N. Frye, Heritage of Persia
Funk, <i>Juden</i>	=	Salomon Funk, Die Juden in Babylonien
Ginzberg, <i>Perushim</i>	=	Louis Ginzberg, Perushim veHiddushim baYerushalmi
Halevi, <i>Dorot</i>	=	I. Y. Halevi, Dorot HaRishonim
Jastrow	=	M. Jastrow, Dictionary of Talmud Babli, Yerushalmi, Midrashic Literature, and Targumim
Krauss, <i>Paras</i>	=	Samuel Krauss, Paras veRomi baTalmud uvaMidrashim
KZ	=	Ka'ab-i Zaradusht
Lieberman, <i>Yerushalmi</i>	=	Saul Lieberman, HaYerushalmi Kifshuto
Levy, or, Levy, <i>Wörterbuch</i>	=	Jacob Levy, Wörterbuch über die Talmudim und Midraschim
Obermeyer, or Obermeyer, <i>Landschaft</i>	=	Jacob Obermeyer, Die Landschaft Babylonien im Zeitalter des Talmuds und des Gaonats. Geographie und Geschichte nach Talmudischen, Arabischen, und anderen Quellen
Pigulevskaja, <i>Villes</i>	=	N. Pigulevskaja, Les Villes de l'État Iranien aux Époques Parthe et Sassanide
Rawlinson, <i>Monarchy</i>	=	George Rawlinson, Seventh Great Oriental Monarchy
Weiss, <i>Dor</i>	=	J. H. Weiss, Dor Dor veDorshav
Yavetz, <i>Toldot</i>	=	Ze'ev Yavetz, Sefer Toldot Yisrael
Zachner, <i>Dawn</i>	=	R. C. Zachner, Dawn and Twilight of Zoroastrianism
—, <i>Zurvan</i>	=	Zurvan, A Zoroastrian Dilemma

## CHAPTER ONE

### THE IRANIAN BACKGROUND

#### I. THE RISE OF THE SASANIAN DYNASTY

By the time they fell from power, with astonishing suddenness in the brief period from the rise of the Sasanians in 211-212, to the coronation of Ardashir in September, 226,<sup>1</sup> the Arsacids had held the throne of Iran for four and a half centuries. The last of these, from the time of Trajan, had proven most critical, for the Romans, mounting three major invasions of Mesopotamia-Babylonia, had captured Ctesiphon twice, under Trajan, and, again, under Avidius Cassius, and seriously threatened to do so still a third time in the last decade of the second century. The Parthians successfully repulsed each attack, however, sometimes by force of arms, mostly by force of circumstance. As a consequence, the Arsacid throne must have seemed more secure at the turn of the third century than it had for generations. Moreover, during the first two decades of that century, the last Arsacid, Ardavan V, achieved remarkable victories over Rome, completely nullifying Caracalla's earlier gains and forcing his successor to pay a humiliating ransom in exchange for the peace of Nisibis in 218. The Parthians had long retained the loyalty of their Semitic subjects, including the series of Semitic petty-states which marked the perimeter of their western frontier; the Jews and Greeks of central Babylonia fully accepted the easy yoke of the Arsacids. The dogged local resistance against repeated Roman invasions indicates how successfully the Parthians had cultivated the minority groups in their western satrapies.

It is, therefore, not easy to explain the rapid turn in events, for the dynasty fell not at a moment of weakness, but in an hour of success in world politics. No wars raged on the frontiers, nor were the subject peoples discontented with their lot, when the Arsacids suddenly fell from power. The incessant dynastic struggle, which in this period pitted Ardavan V against his brother Vologases V, certainly diverted the attention of the court at Ctesiphon from the incipient threat posed by the rise of its vigorous, rebellious satrap, Ardashir, in Persia.

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<sup>1</sup> I follow the chronology of S. H. Taqizadeh, "The Early Sassanians", *AO* 18, 1940, 260f., in particular, 285, 294-299. Compare H. Lewy, "Le Calendrier Perse", *Orientalia* 10, 1941, 45-51.

Ardavan made a feeble response to Ardashir's original advances, which he regarded as mere insolence, and only aroused himself to assemble an army when the vassal achieved notable successes in Kerman, east of Persia, and Media to the north. The Persians overcame Ardavan's forces in several battles, finally killing the last Parthian ruler in April of 227. Ardavan's sons fought on in the north and in Armenia, both of which continued to be ruled by cadet branches of the Arsacid dynasty, but by 228-229, Ardashir had successfully established his rule over the greater part of the Parthian empire, and, moving his court from Fars to Ctesiphon, turned his attention westward, toward the Roman Orient (section II, below).

The precipitous course of events has been variously explained. Some have held that the Persians, rebelling on account of the dissatisfaction of the Magi with their position under the eclectic Parthians, quickly won the loyalties of the other Iranian peoples for religious reasons; others have held that the Persians were motivated by national pride, which had been severely damaged in the preceding centuries; or that the Arsacids were greatly weakened by the exertions of the second century; or that the feuds and civil wars, characteristic of the feudal system by which the Parthians had loosely governed their great empire, in the end brought about their fall. The Magi, however, were not powerful throughout the Iranian empire but, in this period, possibly only in Persis itself, and did not exert sufficient influence either to overthrow a government that ignored them, or to preserve one that favored them, although later on the Sasanians altered this state of affairs. The pride of the Persians in their own glorious past may explain why they followed Papak and Ardashir<sup>1</sup> to battle, but not why they won. Regarding reverses in foreign affairs, the Arsacids lost power not when Rome held Ctesiphon, but as undisputed rulers of most of the Mesopotamian valley. As to the alleged weakness of their government, while their administration was not efficient, they were able to muster

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<sup>1</sup> For the course of Ardashir's revolt, see George Rawlinson, *Seventh Great Oriental Monarchy* (London, 1876), 1-15, 30-39, and Arthur Christensen, *L'Iran sous les Sassanides* (1st edition, Copenhagen and Paris, 1936) 79-91. Rawlinson cites classical and Armenian sources, Christensen adds oriental and numismatic evidence. R. Ghirshman, *Iran: Parthians and Sassanians* (London, 1962), 119, notes that the change in dynasty is no longer regarded as an 'oriental' reaction against the Philhellenism of the Parthians, and Christensen stresses that widespread anarchy preceded the fall of the Arsacids. I do not believe that such anarchy alone led to their fall, however, since the middle of the first century witnessed a general collapse of government in all of Babylonia without similar result.



strong armies for their third effort against the Persians, after two successive and damaging defeats, which would suggest that they managed to rally their feudal supporters with considerable success. So it seems to me that the Persians, fighting for whatever motive, or group of motives, may seem plausible, won for essentially military, rather than political, cultural, or sociological reasons. They fought better, probably because of greater enthusiasm. Since both sides employed similar tactics, and since the sources do not indicate a great disparity in numbers, we may suggest that the Persians, like the Moslem Arabs who brought down their dynasty four centuries later, fought with superior élan, on account of religious inspiration, than did those accustomed to power and unable sufficiently to fear an upstart foe, their own subject, to take early and sufficiently effective action. Iranian tradition looked upon the cataclysmic events as the will of the deity, and modern explanations, though in naturalistic idiom, need not greatly diverge.

Sasan, eponymous ancestor of the new dynasty, was said to have been a priest in the Zoroastrian clergy, which was powerful in Persis, and served at the Istakhr temple. His son, Papak, born about 150, held no higher post, but Papak's son, Ardashir, born about 180, was raised as the protege of Tīre, argabadh of Darabgird, and in 197-8 or 201-2 succeeded to his 'throne', that is to say, to the post of commandant of the garrison and fortress of the town.<sup>1</sup> The year 208 or 211<sup>2</sup> is the date of the commencement of the Sasanian reckoning, and Taqizadeh suggests, most plausibly in my view, that it was then that Ardashir began to struggle for the supremacy of his district, or achieved a major success. (Whatever claims the Sasanians later laid to be heirs of the Achemenids, descended from Darius, the only evidence we have is that before 226, they never said so, or probably had reason to.)

Ardashir spent most of his life engaged in foreign struggles, mainly in securing his throne against intervention from Armenia, Bactria, and Rome. His domestic history may be conveniently summarized here. He married a daughter, or cousin, of Ardavan, so as to legitimize his dynasty by marriage to an Arsacid, though Christensen regards this

<sup>1</sup> M.-L. Chaumont, "Recherches", *JA* 250, 1962, 11-22, on the title and function of the *argapat* and *dizpat*; see also her discussion in *JA* 249, 1961, p. 305; and vol. I, pp. 102, 108.

<sup>2</sup> Taqizadeh, *op. cit.*, 294, holds to 211-212, Chaumont, "Papak, roi de Staxr et sa cour", *JA* 247, 1959, 175-191 gives the date at 208. Taqizadeh cites Tabari who says that Ardashir "sprang" in the Seleucid year 523=211-212.

story as merely folklore.<sup>1</sup> Crowned at Istakhr, where his successors for four centuries were invested, in September, 226, he made Babylonia the center of his interest, settling his capital at Veh-Ardashir (formerly, Seleucia-on-the-Tigris), across the river from Ctesiphon. Full of vigor, he embarked upon an expansive policy of construction, building canals, temples, and other public works, founding numerous new towns, and developing the economy. While war occupied most of his attention, the empire prospered, and when he died, in October of 241,<sup>2</sup> his son Shapur inherited a flourishing régime. At his death the frontiers stretched from the Euphrates to Merv, Herat, and Seistan, and Shapur further extended them. We shall consider Shapur's reign in our review of foreign affairs, because, like his father, he spent most of his life in establishing a powerful and secure empire at his neighbors' expense.<sup>3</sup>

## II SASANIAN FOREIGN POLICY UNDER ARDASHIR AND SHAPUR

The Sasanians' foreign policy<sup>4</sup> had to take account of three major geographical frontiers, that with Rome on the west and northwest,

<sup>1</sup> Christensen, 83-9.

<sup>2</sup> Following Taqizadeh. According to him, Papak died between 214 and 223, but it was Ardashir, and not Papak, who led the revolt. He dates the coronation of Shapur at Attil, 243, and his death in 273. See also R. N. Frye, *Heritage of Persia* (N.Y. — Cleveland, 1963), 199.

<sup>3</sup> Other accounts of early Sasanian history include the following: Ferdinand Justi, *Geschichte des Alten Persiens* (Berlin, 1879), 176-89; A. von Gutschmid, *Geschichte Irans* (Tübingen, 1888), 154-72; A. Christensen in *CAH* XII, 109-114; M.-L. Chaumont, "Le Culte d'Anahita et les Premiers Sassanides", *RHR* 153, 1958, 154-75, on the role of Papak as magus, *arteštar* (warrior), *advenpat* (master of ceremonies), and *patixšai* (director of the revenues of the temple); E. Herzfeld, *Paikuli* (Berlin 1924), 35-51; T. Nöldeke, *Aufsätze zur Persischen Geschichte* (Leipzig, 1887), 86f.; T. Nöldeke, ed. and trans., *Geschichte der Perser und Araber zur Zeit der Sasaniden, Aus der Arabischen Chronik des Tabari* (Leiden, 1879); Frye, *op. cit.*, 198-223; E. Herzfeld, *Archaeological History of Iran* (London, 1935), 76-108; R. Ghirshman, *Iran* (Baltimore, 1954), 290-1; Martin Sprengling, *Third Century Iran. Sapor and Kartir* (Chicago, 1953); and Jean Gagé, *La Montée des Sassanides et l'Heure de Palmyre* (Paris, 1964). Further references are provided in the bibliography and supplementary bibliography.

<sup>4</sup> Iranian, classical, and archaeological sources present a confused picture of Shapur's wars. My account follows the views, in general, of Alföldi, Ensslin, Rostovtzeff, and Maricq, and most especially of W. B. Henning, against those of Olmstead and Christensen. (*CAH* XII pp. 126-137 and *L'Iran* 213-221). The Jewish sources make no contribution whatever to clarifying the picture, but rather (see below, Chap. II section III) themselves must be elucidated by the course of events revealed here.

See Glanville Downey, *History of Antioch in Syria from Seleucus to the Arab Conquest* (Princeton, 1961), 252-264, who holds that Antioch was taken twice,

with Armenia on the north, with the nomad peoples, first the Kushans, and then the Ephthalites on the northeast and east. Ardashir's first major problem concerned Armenia. Like the Arsacids, the Sasanians had to secure their hold over Armenia against both indigenous opposi-

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once in 256, the year of Dura's fall to the Persians, the second time in 260. Downey (587-96) reviews the relevant sources and scholarly opinion to the present time. Compare A. T. Olmstead, "The Mid-Third Century of the Christian Era", *Classical Philology* 27, 1942, and following him, Saul Lieberman, "Palestine in the Third and Fourth Centuries", *JQR* n.s. 37, 1, 1946, 31-41, and contrast M. Rostovtzeff, "Res gestae divi Saporis and Dura", *Berytus* 8, 1943, 17-60, and the full bibliography, to that date, of the *KZ*, provided there. Olmstead thinks that there was an invasion of Syria in 251, following his own interpretation of the Thirteenth Sybilline Book; Rostovtzeff in 253; and Ensslin (cited below) holds that the city was captured only once, in 260. Downey's view is that Shapur made two campaigns, and took Antioch twice, in 256 and 260. With reference to Shapur's siege of Caesarea Mazaca, we must emphasize that there was only *one* campaign in which Shapur reached so far west into Asia Minor, which took place in 260. Whether Shapur took Syria or not before 260, he *never* before that date reached Cappadocia.

Further bibliography includes the following: J. Gagé, "Les Perses à Antioche et les courses de l'hippodrome au milieu du III<sup>e</sup> siècle, à propos du 'transfuge' syrien Mariades", *Bulletin de la Faculté des Lettres de Strasbourg* 31, 1935, 301-324; N. Pigulevskaja, *Les Villes de l'État Iranien*, (Paris, 1963), 124-7; H. M. D. Parker, *History of the Roman World from A.D. 138 to A.D. 337* (London, 1958, 2nd rev. ed.) 148-152, 163-171, 389-390; Giovanni Pugliese-Carattelli, "Res Gestae Divi Saporis", *La Parola del Passato* 5, 1947, 232f.; A. Alföldi, in *CAH* XII, 174-180; G. Mattingly in *CAH* XII, 301-4; F. Justi, *Geschichte des Alten Persiens*, (Berlin, 1879) 182-9; Frye, *Heritage*, 202-8 and 273 n. 16; David Magie, *Roman Rule in Asia Minor to the End of the Third Century after Christ*, (Princeton, 1950, I-II), I, 694-6, II, 1560 n. 12; R. Ghirshman, *Iran*, (Baltimore, 1954), 289-290; Rawlinson, *Seventh Great Oriental Monarchy*, 42-53; P. Asdourian, *Die politischen Beziehungen zwischen Armenien und Rom von 190 v. Chr. bis 142 n. Chr.*, (Venice, 1911) 120-9; Nöldeke, trans., *Tabari*, 14-5, 409f.; T. Nöldeke, *Aufsätze zur Persischen Geschichte*, (Leipzig, 1887) 86f.; R. Ghirshman, *Iran: Parthians and Sassanians*, (London, 1963) 292-4; and M. Sprengling, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

On the Palmyrenes in Syria, see Downey, *Antioch*, 262-9; Parker, *History*, 173-5, 198-205, 392, 395; M. Rostovtzeff, *Caravan Cities*, (Oxford, 1932) 91-119, and his "Res Gestae", *Berytus* 8, 54. Parker holds that Sasanian policy changed, and no longer encouraged the caravan trade to Palmyra; by taking Characene, Shapur began to find his own routes. He suggests, therefore, that it was partly economic necessity that led Odenathus to make war on Shapur, and partly the opportunities of the hour. Rostovtzeff suggests, very hypothetically, that Odenathus' earliest actions antedated 260. He began as an ally of Rome, but very quickly pursued his own interest exclusively. In any event, I follow W. B. Henning (in a personal communication, Aug. 4, 1964), "Odenathus has been most overrated, and most of what is said about his exploits against the Persians is patently absurd."

On the *KZ*, bibliography is extensive. Here are cited only those works consulted to determine the question of Shapur's invasion(s) of Cilicia-Cappadocia, and the more important general introductions to the inscription. See Rostovtzeff in *Berytus* 8; Frye, *Heritage*, 272 n. 1; Parker, *History*, 391f.; A. Maricq, *Syria*, 1958, 295-360, who gives a particularly full bibliography; A. T. Olmstead, *op. cit.*;

tion and Roman intervention. For Rome, Armenia was an important means of securing a route to the Orient to bypass the Iranian-Babylonian entrepôts, and, additionally, served as a major invasion route to threaten the Iranians, just as Armenia might endanger the Roman Orient when in Persian hands. Furthermore Armenia was ruled by a cadet branch of the Arsacid dynasty, and thus posed particular danger to the new dynasty. Since the Armenian Arsacids had Roman support, a clash with the west and north was inevitable. Ardashir himself precipitated it, for, as Dio Cassius says, he had boasted that he would win back everything held by ancient Persia, claiming it all as the rightful inheritance from his forefathers.<sup>1</sup> He invaded Mesopotamia, which fell easily, and threatened Syria. When Alexander Severus reminded him of the Parthian victories of Augustus, Trajan, Lucius Verus, and Septimius Severus, Ardashir replied with an order that Rome evacuate Syria and Western Asia.

In the autumn of 231, Alexander Severus reached Antioch, with a force gathered from the eastern legions. Ardashir likewise fielded a large army, mainly of heavy and light cavalry, as was the Iranian custom. The Romans crossed the Euphrates, and in the spring of 232 recovered the province of Mesopotamia. Alexander then divided his armies into three parts, one to move north, via Armenia to attack Media, the second to threaten Persia from the southern Babylonian marches, and the third, led by Alexander himself, to move between the pincers. The first and second units moved forward, but Alexander's held back, so that the army advancing by the line of the Euphrates

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W. B. Henning, "The Great Inscription of Sapur I," *BSOS* 9, 1939, 823f.; Martin Sprengling, "From Kartir to Shahpuhr I", *AJSL* 57, 1940, 330f.; "Shahpuhr I The Great on the Kaabah of Zoroaster (KZ)," *ibid*, 341f. and "Pahlavi Notes", *ibid*, 58, 1941, 169f.; Ernest Honigsmann and André Maricq, *Recherches sur les Res Gestae Divi Saporis*, Brussels, 1953; and Wilhelm Ensslin, *Zu den Kriegen des Sassaniden Schapur I*, Munich, 1949, *Sitzungs. d. Bayerischen Ak. d. Wissensch., Phil.-Hist. Kl.*, 1947, 5.; W. B. Henning in *Asia Major* 6, 1957, 119; and M. Sprengling, *Third Century Iran, Passim*.

The most important work on Palmyra is that of J. G. Février, *Essai sur l'Histoire Politique et Economique de Palmyre*, Paris, 1931, and *La Religion des Palmyreniens*, Paris, 1931, where full bibliography to that date will be found. See also J. Gagé, *op. cit.*

On Shapur's campaigns and problems of Roman-Iranian relations generally, see also L. Dilleman, *Haute Mésopotamie Orientale et Pays Adjacents* (Paris, 1962), 207-210, and most recently, Karl-Heinz Ziegler, *Die Beziehungen zwischen Rom und dem Partherreich, Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Völkerrechts* (Wiesbaden, 1964), especially 141-154. Compare also Krauss, *Paras* 253-7, and O. Klima, *Manis Zeit und Leben*, Prague, 1962, 192-202.

<sup>1</sup> *Roman History* LXXX, trans. E. Cary, N.Y. 1927, IX, 483.

suddenly confronted the Iranian forces at the heart of the great plains, whose terrain was highly suited to cavalry warfare, and was destroyed by the Persians' superior cavalry and bowmanship. Alexander signaled the retreat to the forces in Media, as well as to the ravaged force on his right. As winter came, the troops in the Median highlands suffered from the harsh climate, while those with Alexander were reduced by disease, an enemy that had devastated the forces of Trajan and Lucius Verus as well. The result was not wholly disastrous, however, for Ardashir was made to understand that Rome would not easily be driven from the Middle East. Matters returned to *status quo ante bellum*, though it is not clear whether this was by treaty or merely by tacit consent.

Ardashir thereupon turned to the final subjugation of Armenia. The Armenian shah, Xosroes, had cooperated with the Romans. Without Roman help, Xosroes could not hope to hold off the Persians. Ardashir hastened matters by arranging for his assassination, and immediately afterward, in the spring of 233, invaded and defeated the Armenian satraps with their Roman allies. Xosroes's son, Trdat, escaped to Rome. For the next seven years, Ardashir spent his time in peaceful pursuits, particularly in the reorganization of Iranian Mazdaism (see below, p. 14f.).

Shapur probably came to the throne in 241, and was crowned in 243. In the next thirty years, before his death in 273, Shapur almost achieved the boast of Ardashir, recovering for a brief time practically the ancient limits of the Achemenids in the west, excluding only the Ionian coast beyond Cappadocia, Palestine, and Egypt. His armies pillaged almost at will in Syria and much of eastern Asia Minor, including not only Armenia, but also Cilicia and Cappadocia. Like the Parthians, Shapur never attempted to establish permanent rule over the Roman Orient, but, as the *KZ* states (1. 12), "Shapur, the king of kings, with his horse, pillaged, burned, and devastated." He established his rule over Iranian and non-Iranian peoples alike, ruling with grand tolerance and sagacity. He could have added to his empire the western territories of Mesopotamia, Syria, and Asia Minor, but he was not a great organizer<sup>1</sup> and did not have the administrative resources to take and hold such vast territories, far beyond those he had inherited.

Shapur's first task was to crush incipient revolts, first in Armenia,

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<sup>1</sup> Frye, *Heritage*, 206.

and then in Hatra. He easily subdued the Armenians. Shortly afterward the king of Hatra, south of Armenia, refused to bow to Shapur, and assumed the rule over considerable territories around the city. Shapur took Hatra, whose walls had withstood the assault of Trajan and Severus, according to tradition with the treasonable connivance of the king's daughter, whom he beguiled with a promise of marriage, and afterward put to death. Hatra's independence calls to mind the tendency of Middle Eastern principalities, from Characene, Nabataea, Armenia, and Herodian Judea in the second and first centuries B.C., to Palmyra in the third A.D., to exploit troubled times to good advantage. Under Shapur, no Iranian-ruled satrapy made such an effort; only Palmyra, client-state of Rome, did so. Shapur turned next to the eastern frontier, and seized Peshawar, the Indus Valley, overwhelmed the Bactrian Kushans, took the area about Samarkand and Tashkent, and deposed the Kushan dynasty.

Having pacified his own territories and strengthened his eastern frontier, Shapur turned west. At this time, Roman politics was in great disarray. Alexander had been murdered in 235 by Maximin, who himself was overthrown in 238. M. Antonius Gordianus, proclaimed emperor in 238, seemed an inconsiderable foe. Shapur advanced westward by way of Nisibis, which offered prolonged resistance before its walls were breached. The taking of Nisibis represented the first major Iranian success in a siege operation involving extensive mining and other engineering procedures. The Parthians had never successfully besieged a great fortress, nor had the Persians been able to prevail against Hatra except by guile. The eastern legions of Rome were thus forewarned that they faced a more formidable adversary than ever before. Gordian gathered a large army to attempt to retrieve the disastrous situation, and, accompanied by an able general, Timesitheus, defeated Shapur near Reasina, recovering Nisibis and returning to the banks of the Tigris in the north. To the changing destinies of Mesopotamia, R. Yohanan applied the Scripture (Daniel 7.5) "And behold, another beast, a second one, like a bear. It was raised up on one side; it had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth; and it was told, Arise, devour much flesh. . ." R. Yohanan said (b. Qid. 72a) that the three ribs refer to Hulwan, Adiabene, and Nisibis, "which Persia sometimes swallowed and sometimes spit out. [The Jews invariably interpreted the bear of Daniel to refer to Persia.]" Shapur retired across Mesopotamia, and the Romans according to their account threatened Ctesiphon before retiring northward, forced to

retreat not by Iranian prowess, but by discontent within the army. Gordian was murdered by the prefect, Philip, near Circesium, and Philip made peace with Shapur, leaving the east in 244, with Armenia in Persian hands, and Mesopotamia safely in Roman possession, an inherently unstable situation.

For more than a decade (the exact chronology becomes very difficult to establish<sup>1</sup>), Shapur kept the peace with Rome, probably because of troubles in the east. He finally provoked a second war in the west, again hoping to take advantage of Roman weakness. After Philip, six weak emperors intervened, four of whom died violent deaths, and the western Roman provinces were threatened by Alemanni, Goths, and Franks. Sometime between 253 and 256, Shapur again moved against the Roman Orient, and retook Nisibis, Carrhae, and Edessa, finally surprising and seizing Antioch, and setting up his headquarters there. The Roman emperor, Valerian, moved eastward, retook Antioch, and his chief prefect Macrianus maneuvered the Roman army into Mesopotamia. These manoeuvres were disastrous, and the army found itself surrounded. Unable to break through the siege lines, Valerian surrendered, and his army was mostly captured, and resettled in the east, where it was set to work on great engineering projects. Shapur thereupon proposed an obscure Antiochan as his candidate for the Roman throne, against Gallienus, Valerian's son, and Macrinus, his prefect, and, to support him, seized Edessa again, in 260, and recaptured Antioch. There he installed as Roman emperor his own candidate, and turned north and westward, into Cilicia and Cappadocia. He took Tarsus, Cilicia Campestris, the Taurus gates, and besieged Caesarea Mazaca, the greatest city of Asia Minor, capturing it after a prolonged struggle.

Shapur could probably have held all of Asia Minor, but he turned back to the Mesopotamian frontier. His object, however, had not been to build an empire in the west, but to destroy one, and he pursued a scorched-earth policy from central Asia Minor to the Euphrates-Tigris frontier. He left the occupied regions in ruins, and while the stories of his excessive cruelty may be exaggerated, he does seem systematically to have attempted the depopulation of part of the Roman Orient, just as Shapur II did in Armenia later on. Laden with plunder, he besieged one more town, Emesa, but without success. On his return home, he was met by an embassy from Odenathus, the

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, 256.

semi-independent ruler of Palmyra, who offered Palmyrene loyalty in exchange for Shapur's friendship. Shapur spurned this offer and the accompanying gifts. Odenathus thereupon trailed the withdrawing army, and at suitable opportunities, fell upon it with a large force of irregulars, until Shapur found safety behind his own frontiers. Odenathus's inroads have been much exaggerated. Shapur certainly returned home with the larger part of his army and booty intact, including great numbers of slaves. The Palmyrenes probably inconvenienced him, rather than posing a serious threat. But Odenathus became a major problem in time. Trying to exploit the weakness of Rome and the temporary inattention of Shapur, who seems to have been occupied with problems in the east, Odenathus crossed the Euphrates in 263, took Carrhae and Nisibis, and besieged Ctesiphon. Odenathus's chief interest, Syria, Palestine, and Mesopotamia in the north, was thus neglected, as he moved eastward. Reenforcements from other parts of the Iranian empire came to the defense of the western capital, and Shapur threw the Palmyrene army out of central Babylonia. The Palmyrenes held Mesopotamia until the capture of his queen and successor, Zenobia, and the destruction of Palmyra by the Romans under Aurelian, in 273.

After the repulse of the Palmyrene threat, Shapur enjoyed his remaining years in peace. Palmyra was kept busy by Rome, the east seems to have been pacified, and Shapur was able serenely to live out his last years undisturbed by war on any front.

### III. NEW CITIES

Ardashir and Shapur were the greatest city-founders of the Sasanian dynasty,<sup>1</sup> founding, renaming, or reviving urban centers throughout the empire. Some of those renamed were merely increased in size, but most received new political status as well. The former city-states of Seleucid and Arsacid times greatly impeded the formation of a strong central government, for they retained rights and privileges from the earlier period. It was imperative to revise their political status, which was done through 'refounding' them, and to develop new cities in a different and more subservient relationship to the central regime. N. Pigulevskaja maintains that Ardashir, having achieved power and unified the state with the support of the military nobility, moved against the feudal class through his policy of urbaniza-

<sup>1</sup> Frye, *Heritage*, p. 202-4, and Pigulevskaja, *Villes*, 97-8, 119-23, 127-8.



tion, attempting in so doing to win new sources of support for the throne. (She holds likewise that the same intention lay behind his strengthening of the status and privileges of the Zoroastrian clergy.) In the third and fourth centuries, autonomous cities, whose rights dated from Seleucid or Arsacid times, disappeared, as formerly free states now served as residences for members of the royal family. (Thus in *KZ* 1. 19 we read of 'the royal city and its province.') Ardashir himself founded six new towns (according to Tabari, eight). Shapur resettled the captive troops of Valerian in new towns, and further transferred both monetary and demographic resources from the ravaged Roman Orient into his own empire, for this purpose building a number of new cities. In Mesene, Shapur founded a city, and it is thought that a number of obscure lines in the Shapur inscription refer to the names of other cities founded by him. Besides city-building, the early Sasanians greatly increased the number of fire-temples, of which Ardashir established several, and Shapur even more, which he listed in his inscription in his own name and in the names of members of his family, of his three sons, Hormizd Ardashir, king of Armenia, Shapur, king of Mesene, and Narseh, king of Sakastan and Tokharistan, and in honor of his many victories.

The new towns served economic, as well as political, purposes. A. Leo Oppenheim points out that the lateness and swiftness of the Euphrates' flood results in the deposit of mud far less fertile than that carried by the Nile.<sup>1</sup> This mud could not be immediately deposited on the fields, but clogged the canals, silted the watercourses, and increased the soil's salinity. It became imperative to redig canals, or to dig new ones, and to resettle population on new land. Oppenheim calls this "an essential part of the economic and political program of a responsible sovereign, rivaling in importance the maintenance of the dikes." The new cities or villages would certainly have produced richer crops, at a smaller investment of seed, than the old. The Sasanians, coming into power with intention to reform the government of their empire, thus brought with them far more prosperous agricultural conditions than had formerly prevailed, as Adams points out.<sup>2</sup> Their policy of founding new towns is reflected in the following:

Rava b. Mehasia in the name of R. Hama b. Goria in the name of Rav said: A man should always seek to dwell in a city only recently populated, for since it is recently populated, its sins are few, as it is

<sup>1</sup> A. Leo Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia* (Chicago 1964), 41-2.

<sup>2</sup> Robert McC. Adams, *Land Behind Baghdad* (Chicago, 1965) 69-84.

said, 'Behold now this city is *near* (KRWBH) to flee to, and it is a little one (Gen. 19.20)'. What is meant by near and small? Surely they could see that for themselves! Rather, because its settlement was *recent* (YŠYBTH KRWBH) its sins are few.

(B. Shab. 10b)<sup>1</sup>

Rav observed new villages and towns to be more prosperous, a condition he naturally ascribed to the spiritual merits of its inhabitants. A town is prosperous because the accumulated sins of its inhabitants are few. His observation, as we have seen, was quite sound, for the new towns *were* more prosperous, their canals bringing more water, their soil containing less salinity, and their crops drawing sustenance from virgin land. One must suppose that the policy of urbanization and of opening new territories greatly affected the lives of Jewish merchants and farmers alike. When people moved to new places, uprooting themselves from old lands and old ways, they became more willing likewise to consider new challenges and to respond to the demands of those who, like the early 'Amora'im, sought to revise their former way of living. It stands to reason therefore that the reforms effected by the rabbis were facilitated by the fact that numbers of Jews were living in new places.

#### IV. SOCIAL-STRUCTURE

The Sasanians divided their empire into a pyramidal class structure, in which there was little mobility across class lines and none among ethnic groups. Society was split into four estates, ecclesiastical, warrior, bureaucratic, and the fourth estate, by far the most numerous, of farmers and artisans. Each class was further divided into subgroups, the clergy into judges, priests (of fires and sacrifices), teachers, and inspectors. The head of the clergy was known as *Mobadhan Mobadh*, the head general, *Eran Spahbadh*, the head of the bureaucracy, *Eran Dibberbadh*, and the head of the fourth estate, *Vastroyōšansalar*. The princes of the empire (*Shahrdaran*), chiefs of the great families (*Vaspuhran*), and knights or free men (*Azādban*) were all members of the first class of state. The second order included chiefs of clans, of the seven great families dating from Parthian times, and so on. The four classes were, of course, unequal in size; the great families held whole provinces, collecting taxes and serving the crown when called upon. By fostering the growth of bureaucracy, creating high officers of state, heads of

<sup>1</sup> Compare the variants in *Dik. Sof.* II, 15, which do not affect the sense of the passage.

administrative offices and other royal officials acting upon the authority of the crown, the emperor sought to curb the power, so vast under the Arsacids, of the great nobility. Under the Sasanians, the number of local dynasties did in fact decline.

The empire was divided into provinces according to the point of the compass, and united by good roads with frequent way stations, and a far-reaching civil administration. The army, commanded by a hereditary general-in-chief of royal blood, was based on heavily armed cavalry, protected by light cavalry, archers, elephants, and a rear guard. The infantry was the weakest element, consisting of poorly armed peasants. But as we have noted, the Sasanians developed engineering skills unavailable to the Parthians.

The priests administered justice and education. Their authority extended beyond the cult, but pertained to the legalization of births and marriages, purification rites, and so forth. They owned enormous territories, possessed resources far beyond their regular revenues of tithes and gifts, and represented a state within the state, governed, like the state itself, by a minutely regulated and graduated hierarchy. Under the Sasanians the great law collections, the Erpatestan, the Nirangastan, and the Husparan Nask, ecclesiastical and ritual codes, were completed. The priests were well treated and highly regarded. They settled many public questions, and the Armenian historian Agathias reported that among the Persians, "nothing is considered lawful and just unless it had been approved by a Magus." The Magi lived by their own laws. The Magus (*Mogh*) was under the authority of the *Herpat* (chief of fire), and *Mobad* (chief of Magi), headed at the top of the pyramid by the *Herpatan Herpat* (chief justice) and *Mobadan Mobad* (high priest). In addition to their priestly duties, the Magi dominated law and culture, decided law cases, taught reading, writing, and arithmetic to townsmen and merchants, and offered ethical guidance.

Taxes applied to land, while non-property-owners paid a head tax. They were collected by the estates, or, among the minorities, who paid heavier imposts, by communities. Thus the Nazarenes paid through their own bishops. Tax collection was strictly supervised; farmers could not harvest until land taxes, proportionate to the crop, were collected. Customs were paid, and crown lands produced revenues in addition; there was considerable indirect taxation, and corvées were common as well. Trade was very strictly regulated, and, of course, taxed. For its part, the government improved the roads,

provided water supplies along them, developed caravanseries and frontier posts and ports, imported mulberry trees and silk worms from China, and in other ways increased investment in the economy.<sup>1</sup>

Although in Iranian culture, agriculture was the most honored profession, and farmers were assured of rich rewards in the world to come, the hard life of the farmer was recognized by Rav, who strongly advised his sons to enter commerce and avoid agriculture. The following stories reveal his attitude:

Rav once entered among growing ears of wheat. Seeing that they were swaying, he called out to them, Swing as you will, engaging in business brings more profit than you can. (B. Yev. 63a)

[Rav advised his son, Aibu]: I have labored over your studies without success, so come and I shall teach you worldly wisdom. Sell your wares while the sand is still on your feet. Everything you may sell and regret [should the price rise] save wine, which you may sell without regret [for it might go sour]. Untie your purse and then open your sacks [Pocket payment before delivery] . . . When dates are in your bag, run to the brewery.

(B. Pes. 113a)

[To Rav Kahana he said], Even if you merely ascend to the roof, take food with you. Even if a hundred pumpkins cost but a zuz in town, let them be under your skirts [stock up].

(B. Pes. 113a)

While many of the 'Amora'im were in trade or crafts, nonetheless, the bulk of the Jewish population, like the Iranians and other groups in the Persian empire, engaged in agriculture.<sup>2</sup>

#### V. THE SASANIAN STATE-CHURCH

As we shall see below, the Jews knew very little about Sasanian Zoroastrianism, except for some of the external manifestations of

<sup>1</sup> Relevant works include Frye, *op. cit.*, 200-202, 206-7, and for a list of the officers of Ardashir's court, 201, and of Shapur's, 206-7; Rawlinson, *Monarchy*, 60-62; Christensen in *CAH* XII, 114-118; in *L'Iran* 92-136; Ghirshman, *Iran*, 308-14; on the reorganization of the army, see Ghirshman, *op. cit.*, 291-2; on the growing sophistication of economic practice, 342; on taxes, Christensen, *L'Iran* 117-121, Ghirshman, 311, 345; on the organization of the empire into classes, Christensen, *L'Iran*, 92-110, of the army, 124-7, of the bureaucracy 127-31; on industry and commerce, 121-124.

<sup>2</sup> See J. Newman, *Agricultural Life of the Jews in Babylonia*, London 1932; Louis Jacobs, "The Economic Conditions of the Jews in Babylon in Talmudic Times compared with Palestine", *JSS* II 1957 349-59. M. Beer's *Ma'amadam Ha kalkali veba'Hevrat shel 'Amora'ei Bavel* (Ramat Gan, 1963) provides a singularly thorough account of the economic position of the 'Amora'im throughout the Talmudic period.

the faith. We shall, therefore, survey briefly only those aspects of Sasanian religion relevant to this study, the most important of which are the development of a state-cult under Ardashir, and the modulation of religious militancy by Shapur.

The Sasanians associated themselves with the cult of Anahita and Ohrmazd throughout their rule, although in time Anahita like Mithra was relegated to second place in the state cult.<sup>1</sup> While Ardashir made Mazdaism the state cult, this did not take place in one year, nor was the process completed by one emperor alone. First of all, even among the Iranian peoples there was much syncretism, with many local cults flourishing. Second, the minority peoples, though influenced by Mazdaism, never abandoned their ancestral gods. The Jews, Christians, and probably, Mandeans, took no part whatever in the state religion, nor were these groups willing to abandon their faith even under persecution. In fact, we may discern three successive stages in the establishment of Mazdaism and consequent attitudes towards other religions, first, the earliest establishment by Ardashir and his chief priest, Tosar, second, the development of a policy of toleration by Shapur, and finally, the beginnings of a period of reaction toward the end of Shapur's reign and afterward, led by Kartir.

Under Ardashir, just as the royal court was reorganized, to centralize under its bureaucracy the actual government of the empire, so the state church was created for very much the same purpose.<sup>2</sup> Ardashir established a hierarchy of church officials with the Magi at the bottom, as we have noted, and *Mobads* over each ecclesiastical district. The chief of the *Herpats*, teaching priests, was Tansar or Tosar,<sup>3</sup> charged by Ardashir with the actual reorganization of the church. The church officials vigorously persecuted other religions, were exceptionally intolerant, and would allegedly imprison and catechize one who sinned against the faith, and, if the sinner refused to confess his error, would put him to death. How far such activities extended within the Jewish

<sup>1</sup> Ghirshman, *Iran*, 314-8. See also J. Duchesne-Guillemin, *La Religion de l'Iran Ancien* (Paris 1962), 276-308; J. C. Puech, *Le Manichéisme* (Paris 1949), 38f, 120f; on the popularity of Anahita, Pigulevskaja, *Villes*, *op. cit.*, 234f.; on widespread syncretism, Christensen, *L'Iran*, 110-117.

<sup>2</sup> See Richard N. Frye, "Notes on the Early Sassanian State and Church", *Studi Orientalistici in onore di Giorgio Levi Della Vida* I, Rome, 1956, 314-35. See also H. Lewy, *op. cit. Orientalia* 10, 1940, 56-62.

<sup>3</sup> On Tosar, see Pigulevskaja, *Villes*, 100-102; J. Darmesteter, "Lettre de Tansar au Roi de Tabaristan", *JA 9th ser. III* 1894, 185-250, 502-555; Duchesne-Guillemin, *La Religion*, 64, 279f.; Christensen, "Abarsam et Tansar", *Acta Orientalia* X, 1936, 43-55; Frye, 209.