

# When the End is Near: Barbarized Armies and Barracks Kings of Late Antique Iran

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In a recent study of the end of Late Antique Iran, PARVANEH POURSHARIATI has brought forth the tantalizing hypothesis that the house of Pahlāv (Parthians) had a major hand in the disintegration of the Sasanian Empire in the seventh century CE.<sup>1</sup> I am very much in agreement with her assessment and believe that she has convincingly demonstrated the case. Still, the house of Pahlāv is only part of an underlying cause in the collapse of the Sasanians. By using textual and numismatic sources, I would like to provide an outline and a new periodization of seventh century Iran in order to highlight this underlying cause and other reasons for the disintegration of the Sasanian dynasty. Furthermore, this study will demonstrate that the Sasanian generals and their armies were a major factor in the weakening of *Ērānšahr*.

It is important to look at Khusro II's wars with Rome to better understand the Sasanian Empire's downward spiral. By 628 CE, Sasanian Iran was on the verge of political disorder, but all hope had not yet been lost. The Perso-Roman wars were the main reason for the decline and chaos in the early seventh century. Khusro II's fortunes were subsiding in 590 CE against Wahrām VI, and he had to cede territory to the Romans in order to make an alliance and receive aid from that empire. By 600 CE, when Khusro II had consolidated his power, he decided to take back the territories he had previously ceded. While the past campaigns between the two great powers had been concentrated on the bordering provinces and the buffer regions of Armenia and Syria, this war was very different. Khusro II took himself to the heart of the Eastern Roman Empire, and was able to conquer and ravage much of western Asia in a rather short time. At first, Armenia was captured,<sup>2</sup> and in 604 CE, with blazing speed, Khusro II's two Generals Šāhīn and Šahrwarāz conquered Syria,<sup>3</sup> Palestine and Jerusalem

- 1 P. POURSHARIATI: *Decline and Fall of the Sasanian Empire: The Sasanian-Parthian Confederacy and the Arab Conquest of Iran*. London 2008, p. 3.
- 2 *Narratio de rebus Armeniae*, 109–113 (p. 41), G. GREATREX/S.N.C. LIEU: *The Roman Eastern Frontier and the Persian Wars. Part II AD 363–630*. London/New York 2002, pp. 186–187.
- 3 M. MORONY: "Syria Under the Persians 610–629." In: *Proceedings of the Second Symposium on the History of Bilād al-Shām During the Early Islamic Period up to 40 A.H. / 640 A.D.* Ed. by M. A. BAKHIT. Amman 1987, pp. 87–95.

in 614 CE<sup>4</sup> and in turn Egypt were taken in 619 CE,<sup>5</sup> and the Iranians ventured as far as Libya,<sup>6</sup> while Anatolia was conquered between 619–622 CE.

So, for 28 years a devastating war took place which weakened both the Romans and the Iranians. The length of stay by the Iranians in those regions suggests a very different tactic or reasoning as to why they had conquered the Near East. The Iranians were planning to stay and change the political map of the world. However, ultimately, the earlier successes of Khusro II gave way to Heraclius' victories which brought about the end of Khusro II's reign in 628 CE. From the Black Sea, Heraclius moved to Armenia and into the Sasanian Empire. In 624 CE he sacked the sacred Zoroastrian fire-temple of Gušnasp at Šīz<sup>7</sup> in retaliation for the taking of the fact that Khusro II's forces took the "True Cross". As a result, this war may be seen as the first "Crusade" war in Eurasian history. Along with the retreating Iranian army, the Persian nobility and those attached to the Iranians also retreated from Syria and Mesopotamia.<sup>8</sup> This was a scenario which was to be repeated for the Iranians in Mesopotamia some two decades later with the Arab conquest.

What was different in this campaign is that Khusro II had gone beyond the norm and had made deep incursions in the heart of the Eastern Roman Empire. For example, the Sasanians had stationed themselves in Egypt for almost a decade, far from their center of power. Indeed as J. Howard-Johnston has stated, Khusro II had destroyed the long-established binary world order which had existed for many centuries.<sup>9</sup> The fall of Khusro II brought political instability to the Sasanian Empire from which it would not recover.<sup>10</sup>

4 F. C. CONYBEARE: "Antiochus Strategos' Account of the Sack of Jerusalem in A.D. 614." In: *English Historical Review* 25 (1910), pp. 502–517. Also see *Chronicon Paschale*, M. WHITBY/M. WHITBY: *Chronicon Paschale 284–628*. Liverpool 1990 (Translated Texts for Historians), for the events of 614, p. 156.

5 A. GARIBOLDI: "Social Conditions in Egypt under the Sasanian Occupation (619–629 CE)." In: *La Paola del passato. Rivista di studi antichi* (2009), pp. 321–353.

6 R. ALTHEIM-STIEHL: "The Sasanians in Egypt – Some Evidence of Historical Interest." In: *Bulletin de la société d'archéologie Copte* 31 (1992), pp. 87, 92; on the papyrological evidence see E. VENETIS: "The Sassanid Occupation of Egypt (7<sup>th</sup> Cent. A.D.) According to Some Pahlavi Papyri Abstracts." In: *Greco-Arabica* 9–10 (2004), pp. 403–412. The papyri have been translated by D. WEBER: *Berliner Papyri, Pergamente und Leinenfragmente in mittelpersischer Sprache*. London 2003 (CII).

7 A. M. THEOPHANES 6114, 307.19–308.25; Movsēs Daskhuranst' ī II.10 (130.3–132.5), GREATREX/LIEU, pp. 200–203, and for other sources see N. GARSOĪAN: "Byzantium and the Sasanians." In: *CHI* 3(1), p. 592.

8 J. M. FIEY: "The Last Byzantine Campaign into Persia and Its Influence on the Attitude of the Local Populations Towards the Muslim Conquerors 7–16 H./628 A.D." In: *Proceedings of the Second Symposium on the History of Bilād al-Shām During the Early Islamic Period up to 40 A.H./640 A.D.* Ed. by M. A. BAKHIT. Amman 1987, p. 97.

9 J. HOWARD-JOHNSTON: "Pride and Fall: Khusro II and His Regime, 626–628." In: *La Persia e bisanzio*. Roma 2004, p. 113.

10 Some sources state that Khusro II had fallen ill in Ctesiphon and was dying, A. M. THEOPHANES 6118 (325.10–327.16), GREATREX/LIEU, p. 223.

After the death of Khusro II, his sons, daughters and grandson came to the throne, but the empire was never unified in its allegiance to the king of kings. The textual sources provide a less than perfect and uniform list of rulers and contenders.<sup>11</sup> This order and scheme becomes even more problematic when we consider the numismatic evidence, because coins were minted by several rulers and contenders whose names are not attested in historical texts, and in turn, some whose names do appear in textual sources do not seem to have minted any coins. Furthermore, it seems that the Sasanian kings, queens and contenders did not control all of the provinces of the empire and were able to mint coins in only a few provinces. Thus, some of the unknown rulers/contenders who struck coins could have ruled in the various parts of the empire simultaneously.

*Tarīkh Bal'amī*, followed by the *Fārsnāme* of Ibn Balkhī provide a good account of the events. We can summarize the situation after Khusro II's death in the following manner: From the time of Kawād II onwards, due to lack of legitimacy, the Sasanian heirs to the throne could not control the empire, and neither the court nor the provinces of the empire acknowledged their sovereignty. This of course is an after-the-fact reflection by our historian, when the Sasanians had collapsed. Still this statement is certainly true and may be the major reason for the disintegration of the Sasanian Empire.

This crisis in legitimacy was neither brought about in the time of Khusro II, nor was it created at the time of Yazdgerd III. It rather required a longer period of time to come about, and indeed the era of disintegration can be divided into three distinct periods. The first began during the reign of Kawād II (628 CE) and lasted until the rule of the Sāsānian queen Bōrān (630 CE). This phase can be called the period of "Fratricide and the Waning of Monarchic Legitimacy". The second period is the period from the reign of Bōrān to that of Yazdgerd III (630–632 CE), which can be called the era of "Factionalism and Division". This would lead to the third period, the rule of Yazdgerd III and his "Wandering Kingship".

The numismatic evidence for the three phases is invaluable, since coins are one of the few primary sources available for this period and provide information beyond our textual evidence. We know that when a ruler came to power, one

- 11 The list of rulers and contenders according to the most important textual sources are as follows:
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|-------------|--|
| Sebēos:     | Kawād, Ardaxšīr, Khoram, Bebor, Khusro, Āzarmīgduxt, Hormoz, Yazdgerd;   |
| Tabarī:     | Kawād, Ardaxšīr, Šahrwarāz Bōrān, Jošsandeh, Āzarmīgduxt, Farrokhzād, Yazdgerd;  |
| Mas'ūdī:    | Kawād, Ardaxšīr, Šahrwarāz, Bōrān, Pērōz, Farrokhzād, Yazdgerd;  |
| Tha'ālibī:  | Kawād, Ardaxšīr, Šahrwarāz, Bōrān, Āzarmīgduxt, Yazdgerd;  |
| Isfahānī:   | Kawād, Ardaxšīr, Bōrān, Āzarmīgduxt, Yazdgerd;   |
| Bal'amī:    | Kawād, Ardaxšīr, Šahrwarāz, Bōrān, Jošnasandeh; Āzarmīgduxt, Khusro Mīhr-Jošnas, Zād-Khusro, Pērōz, Farrokhzād-Khusro, Yazdgerd; |
| Ibn Balkhī: | Kawād, Ardaxšīr, Šahrwarāz, Khusrō, Bōrān, Pērōz Jošsandeh, Āzarmīgduxt, Farrokhzād Khusro, Yazdgerd                             |

of the first things that he or she did was to strike coins in his/her name. This is made very clear when we see that even the contenders who ruled or held power in a certain area, even for short periods in the seventh century, surely minted coins. Their rules, however, seem to have been short or negligible enough for them to be omitted from the literary sources. The mints of the Sasanian Empire were most active in the seventh century during the reign of Khusro II (590–628 CE). While there were about 20 major mints in operation,<sup>12</sup> we have mint signatures for about 100 cities which were mainly temporary mints.<sup>13</sup> Khusro II, because of the war with Rome, had many active mints, but the majority of the coins was struck in about 25 to 30 cities. Until the last years of his reign, these active mints represented the provinces acknowledging his authority. After the demise of Khusro II, which marked a turbulent period of Iranian history, his son Kawād II was the last Sāsānian monarch to control the entire empire until Yazdgird III. In fact, most of the major cities minted coins in Kawād's name and acknowledged his rule.<sup>14</sup>

### Fratricide and the Waning of Monarchic Legitimacy: Kawād II – Ardaxšīr III (628–630 CE)

The reign of Kawād II is the beginning of the period of “Fratricide and the Waning of Monarchic Legitimacy”. While Kawād II (628 CE) was in control of many cities, his legitimacy seems to have come under question. This is apparent from a statement by Tha'ālībī, who states that Kawād's rule was not accepted by all the provincial rulers.<sup>15</sup> This questioning of his rule must have initially made his situation precarious, and Kawād's efforts to consolidate his rule seem to eventually have been among the major reasons for the decline of the dynasty. The most imprudent action of Kawād's reign was a fratricide. All of his sixteen (according to other accounts, seventeen) brothers were killed in order to secure his position. While this fratricide may initially have brought a sense of security to the new king of kings, it ultimately wiped out any legitimate male heir to the Sāsānian throne.<sup>16</sup> Beside this event, there were other problems such as

12 R. GÖBL: “Sasanian Coins.” In: *CHI* 3(1), p. 332.

13 PARUCK lists some 253 mint marks, but the high number is questionable, see F.D.J. PARUCK: “Mint-Marks on Sāsānian and Arab-Sāsānian Coins.” In: *The Journal of the Numismatic Society of India* V, Part I (1943), pp. 79–151; GÖBL states that there were about 100 mints, p. 332.

14 H. M. MALEK: “The Coinage of the Sasanian King Kawād II (AD 628).” In: *The Numismatic Chronicle* 155 (1995), pp. 119–129.

15 Tha'ālībī: *Akhhār mulūk fars wa siyrahūm*. Edited and translated by M. FAZA'LI. Tehran (Noqreh Publishers) 1368, p. 463.

16 Al-Isfahānī provides the names of the eighteen brothers (*Tārīkh siny mulūk al-arḍ wa al-anbiya'*. Tehran 1367, p. 58); Sebēos reports that forty children of Xūsro II were killed at the instigation of the nobility (p. 109); MALEK 1993, p. 120.

the plague that devastated the Sāsānian capital and its population.<sup>17</sup> The plague simply compounded the problem and isolated the capital and psychologically reduced the charisma and importance of the centre of the Sasanian Empire.

This complete loss of legitimacy and the absence of an heir to the throne continued with the rule of Ardaxšīr III. Ardaxšīr III was just a child when he was put on the throne, and so the Khwān-Sālār from the Ādūr-Gošnasp became what the sources retrospectively call *Wazīr* (i.e., *Wuzurg-framādār*) in the Islamic sources.<sup>18</sup> The Sāsānian general Šahrwarāz took advantage of the situation and took Ctesiphon, overthrowing the young king.<sup>19</sup> Šahrwarāz himself ruled for one year and six months and was then killed.<sup>20</sup> According to Sebēos, Šahrwarāz undertook the campaign to usurp the throne at the instigation of Heraclius, who promised support not only for him, but also for his descendants:

Your king Kawād has died, and the throne of the kingdom has come to you. I bestow it on you, and on your offspring after you. If an army is necessary, I shall send to your assistance as many [troops] as you may need. Let us make a pact between me and you with an oath, in writing and with a seal.<sup>21</sup>

This meant that a coup d'état by a general, backed by the Roman Emperor, had taken place and a Roman meddling in Iranian affairs, similar to what the Persians had done after Emperor Maurice's death. This was a break with the established tradition that only a person from the family of Sasan could rule *Ērānšahr*.<sup>22</sup> This situation demonstrates the beleaguered state of the monarchy and the government, and Tha'ālibī is perceptive in reporting that during the reign of young Ardaxšīr III the country was in a state of decline, with the glory of the monarchy destroyed, the governance of the country in disarray, the local lords in disobedience and a general state of anarchy.<sup>23</sup>

The following period can be called the era of "Factionalism and Division" beginning with the rule of the Sasanian queen, Bōrān in 630 CE and lasting until

17 The plague which occurred in his time is said to have killed much of the military force and the grandees (*Tarikh Bal'amī*. Ed. by M. T. BAHĀR. Tehran 1353, pp. 1185–1186; Ibn Balkhī: *Fārsnāme*. Ed. by G. LE STRANGE and R. A. NICHOLSON. London/Cambridge 1921, 1921, p. 108); Mas'ūdī reports that in Iraq alone half of the population was wiped out (*Kitāb Murūj al-dhahab wa-ma'ādīn al-Jawāhir*, p. 274; al-Ṭabarī: *Ta'rikh al-rusul wa'l-mulūk*, pp. 779–780).

18 *Tarikh Bal'amī*, p. 1193.

19 *Tarikh Bal'amī*, p. 1195.

20 *Tārikh al-rasūl wa al-mulūk*, pp. 780–781; *Fārs-nāme*, pp. 108–109; *Chronicle of Seert* 93, PO 13.556; GREATREX/LIEU 2002, p. 227.

21 *The Armenian History attributed to Sebeos*. Translated, with notes, by R. W. THOMSON. Historical commentary by J. HOWARD-JOHNSTON. Assistance from T. GREENWOOD. Part I. *Translation and Notes*. Liverpool 1999, Chapter 40.129, p. 88.

22 Wahrām Čōbīn is the other notable example, see T. DARYAEE: "Religio-Political Propaganda on the Coinage of Khusro II." In: *Journal of the American Numismatic Society* 7 (1997), pp. 51–63.

23 Tha'ālibī: *Akhhār mulūk fars wa siyrahūm*, p. 465.

the enthronement of Yazdgerd III in 632 CE. Although textual sources state that she tried to amend the situation, it appears that Bōrān was unsuccessful and her sovereignty was not accepted by many local rulers, especially the house of Pahlāv,<sup>24</sup> and only a few cities acknowledged her rule. This is apparent under her successors, such as Āzarmīduxt who was not able to control most of the provinces either.

### Factionalism and Division: Bōrān, Arzarmīduxt, Khusro III, Khusro IV, Pērōz II, Hormizd V (630–636 CE)

POURSHARIATI has mentioned that this period seems to defy any understanding.<sup>25</sup> The period from Bōrān to Yazdgerd III's rule, I believe, introduced another phenomenon, further demonstrating the disintegration of the empire, and that is the minting of coins by several contenders in their own name and at that same time.<sup>26</sup> We have a list of the names given in the textual sources and also coins with the names of some of these rulers. They include Khusro III (630–632 CE), Khusro IV (630–636 CE?) and Pērōz II (631–632 CE) who ruled approximately at the same time and minted coins in different provinces and some even in the same province. Sebēos reports that there was a certain Khusro after Bōrān, while Mas'ūdī mistakenly places this Khusro after Šahrwārāz and before Bōrān. Ibn Balkhī reports that there were two Khusros ruling at this time. This textual evidence can persuade us that there was indeed another Khusro who ruled for some time, since it is also supported by numismatic evidence. According to Sebēos, Khusro III was from the Sāsānian family<sup>27</sup> and according to Ibn Balkhī, he ruled for one year and a half.<sup>28</sup> Khusro then can be identified with the coins of a ruler with the same name which have the years 1, 2, and 3. They were all struck in Fārs, and the coins demonstrate his long rule in comparison with other monarchs of the seventh century, and perhaps that he ruled outside of the capital. What is significant is that unlike other monarchs before or after, Khusro III and IV are not reported to have been killed, but rather to have ruled

24 POURSHARIATI, *passim*.

25 POURSHARIATI, p. 161.

26 POURSHARIATI disagrees with this idea, p. 161; H. M. MALEK: "A Survey of Research on Sasanian Numismatics." In: *The Numismatic Chronicle* 153 (1993), pp. 229–251; for the different mints and years of the succeeding rulers see also M. I. MOCHIRI: *Études de numismatique iranienne sous les Sassanides et Arabe-Sassanides*. II. Tehran 1983 [revised edition]; I have seen many of the coins of these years at the American Numismatic Society where I was a research fellow in the summer of 1995. For Bōrān's reign see H. EMRANI: "Late Sasanian Imperial Ideology & the Rise of Bōrān to Power." In: *e-Sasanika* 9 (2009).

27 Sebēos' *History*, p. 115.

28 *Fārsnāme*, p. 109.

for some time. In this case they may still have been attempting to rule in some part of the empire while a king was crowned at Ctesiphon.

As mentioned, there are coins of Khusro III up to year 3 for WYHC in Fārs, while coins for another Khusro (IV?) have been found from the mints of AYLAN and WYHC for years 2 and 4–7. AYLAN may have been an imperial mobile mint and could have been placed with the army, but Khusro IV must have been close to Fārs, since his other mint is WYHC. AYLAN of course has also been assigned to the city of Susa in Khuzestān, thus he may have controlled that region. The evidence from the coinage demonstrates the weakness of the central government, which could not even control the areas adjacent to Mesopotamia, the seat of the government. With this scheme one also has to question what was going on in the other parts of the empire that were even more distant from Ctesiphon and for which we have no textual or numismatic evidence. Other contenders should be mentioned, such as Farroxzād and Hormizd V. Hormizd V has been identified as Farrox-Hormizd, the General who may have had a hand in the death of Āzarmīduxt.<sup>29</sup> He was a powerful king as he minted coins in Xūzestān and Persis (Fārs).<sup>30</sup>

A very important point was raised by NÖLDEKE in the nineteenth century and again by HOWARD-JOHNSTON in the twentieth about the Sasanian military which is at the heart of the problem.<sup>31</sup> I would like to emphasize the point that what we have here is the existence of several generals and their armies as king makers. It is not the case that it is only the Pahlāv generals in Khurāsān that have a hand in the political decision making. One can suggest that there are two phenomena which have a direct bearing on the situation in the seventh century CE. Both phenomena could be found in Roman history as well, which caused confusion and also the fall or decline or transformation of that empire. For the Sasanians, it appears that in comparison to Rome, the order of the two phenomena was reversed.

The Roman Empire faced a period of instability in the third century CE<sup>32</sup> which has come to be known as the period of Barracks Emperors. This refers to the time when different military camps proclaimed a general as emperor. Many of the emperor-generals were assassinated and rapidly replaced, some ruling for only a short time. The second factor occurred in the fourth and the beginning of the fifth century CE, when the Roman army conscripted nomadic/Germanic forces, a phenomenon which has been called the Barbarization of the Roman army.<sup>33</sup> This

29 M. I. MOCHIRI: *Études de numismatique Iranienne sous les Sassanides*. I. Téhéran 1972, pp. 13–16.

30 For the coinage and mints see R. GYSELEN: *New Evidence for Sasanian Numismatics: The Collection of Ahmad Saeedi*. Bures-sur-Yvette 2004 (Res Orientalis XVI), p. 66.

31 HOWARD-JOHNSTON 2004, pp. 224–225.

32 P. BROWN: *The World of Late Antiquity AD 150-750*. London 1971, pp. 22–24.

33 C. R. WHITTAKER: *Frontiers of the Roman Empire: A Social and Economic Study*. Baltimore/London 1994, *passim*.

in turn caused the weakening of the Roman army and a structure which made it unable to withstand the Germanic conquest of Rome and the empire.

For the Iranian case, A. TAFAZZOLĪ has discussed the breaking up of the old military order and the powers of the great houses of the nobility which were replaced by the Dehgāns as the supporters of the crown.<sup>34</sup> For the Sasanians, Z. RUBIN has pointed out that in the sixth century CE we encounter the Barbarization of the army, where nomadic tribes, such as the Dēylamites and others were conscripted in the army.<sup>35</sup> Thus, one may suggest that the new army's loyalty would first and foremost be to their tribe and the general in charge. There are many similarities between this situation and that of the Abbasid period, when Turkic soldiers were taken into the Caliph's army and their loyalty eventually remained with their general, or Sultan. How cohesive such an army is likely to have been is difficult to answer, but surely less so than before Khusro I's reforms of the military. As M. Zakeri has mentioned, Khusro I's military reforms and the division of the army was a dangerous innovation which made the four generals very powerful.<sup>36</sup> It would have been much easier for such an army to serve their own interest and that of their general first, even when dealing with the Arab forces during the conquest, than the Sasanian king of kings. Khusro I had decimated the old Sasanian military order and the noble houses which could not and did not have the same might as in the early Sasanian period and so could not come to rescue the empire from chaos.

The second phenomenon is the idea of Barracks Emperors of the Sasanian Empire. While there was the important family of Pahlāv with its army in north-eastern *Ērānšahr*, there were other armies which seem to have had a hand in the raising and killing of the Sasanian kings. We are told that an army in Mesopotamia which was initially headed by Šahrwarāz placed Āzarmīgduxt on the throne at Ctesiphon. She was replaced by Hormizd V who also controlled Mesopotamia and northwestern *Ērānšahr*. Yazdgerd III was finally placed on the throne by Mihr-Khusro who was backed by another army in Khurasan. We also hear of the army of Adūrbādagān (in the northwest) which was lead by Khorokh Hormizd (probably Hormizd V) who was Bōrān's chief minister.<sup>37</sup> These pressures and actions by the Sasanian military were the real factors in bringing chaos and the demise of the empire. By the time the Arabs arrived, the Sasanian armies had been divided and their loyalty to the crown shaken.

34 A. TAFAZZOLĪ: "Dehqān. i. In the Sasanian Period." In: *EIr* VII, pp. 223–225.

35 Z. RUBIN: "The Reforms of Khusro Anūshirwān." In: *The Byzantium and Early Islamic Near East*. Ed. by A. CAMERON. New Jersey 1995, p. 285.

36 M. ZAKERI: *Sāsānid Soldiers in Early Muslim Society. The Origins of 'Ayyārān and Futūwwa*. Wiesbaden 1995, p. 32.

37 Sebeos, Chapter 40, p. 89; HOWARD-JOHNSTON also mentions the Chronicle of Seert to corroborate this point, p. 225. I was not able to consult this source. For Hormizd see A. ŠH. SHAHBAZI: "Hormozd V." In: *EIr* XII, pp. 467–468.



## Wandering Kingship: Yazdgerd III (632–651 CE)

The period of fragmentation continued into the last phase which is overshadowed by Yazdgerd III's rule and a new era which can be called "Wandering Kingship." This wandering was more than anything a result of lack of support for Yazdgerd III in the provinces where he camped. He was crowned at the Ādūr-Ānāhid fire temple at Staxr, just as Ardaxšīr I had been, which may suggest aspirations for a renewal and for a period of stability and legitimate rule. The number of cities which minted coins in the name of Yazdgerd III would seem to indicate that his sovereignty was acknowledged by many provinces. This, however, is misleading, since during his relatively long reign from 632–651 CE, not all mints were active at the same time. Only the cities in the vicinity of the wandering king struck coins and acknowledged his rule for short periods of time. While most of the northern mints of the Iranian Plateau are inactive in this period, when Yazdgerd III was in the West, the mints of MY (Mēšān), LAM (Rām-Hormizd), LYW (Rēw-Ardaxšīr) and the mints of Fārs were the ones which acknowledged his rule. As the wandering king moved to the central Iranian plateau, the western cities stopped minting and only some cities in Fārs, those of BYŠ (Bēšābuhr), ŠI (Šērāz), and ART (Ardaxšīr-Xwarrah) and eastern mints, GLM (Garm-Kermān), BN (Gwāšīr), and NAL (Narmšīr) struck coins in his name. In the last years of his reign, only five mints struck coins in his name, those of GLM, BN, NAL, SK (Sīstān), and BBA (the Imperial mobile mint). This can only mean that the mints were in operation when the monarch was in the vicinity and either used the mints to pay the troops and his retinue or forced them to mint coins in his name. As he moved towards the east, mints in the west subsided and the mints of the east became active.

This last phase then constitutes an era of the wandering king, when a ruler did not control any set area outside of his immediate vicinity. This type of kingship also developed in Europe from the sixth century CE with the disintegration of the Roman Empire, and this meant that the king had to continuously move around in his realm or domain to make his presence felt and receive allegiance.<sup>38</sup> Yazdgerd III had a similar problem and therefore had no success in bringing stability to the Sāsānian Empire as a wandering king.<sup>39</sup> The divisions within the empire among the generals and their military contingents made it impossible for

38 For a discussion of the European development of wandering kingship see J. W. BERNHARDT: *Itinerant Kingship and Royal Monasteries in Early Medieval Germany, c. 936–1075* (Cambridge 1993); for the other regions of Europe see H. C. PEYER: "Das Reisekönigtum des Mittelalters." In: L. SCHMUGGE et al. (ed.): *Könige, Stadt und Kapital: Aufsätze zur Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte des Mittelalters*. Zürich 1982, pp. 98–115.

39 For the importance of charisma for the wandering king see, C. GEERTZ: "Centers, Kings, and Charisma: Reflections on the Symbolics of Power." In: J. BEN-DAVID/T. N. CLARK (ed.): *Culture and its Creators, Essays in honor of Edward Shils*. Chicago/London 1977, pp. 150–171.

Yazdgerd III to muster a large army to face the Arab conquerors. This was another side-effect of the reorganization of the Sasanian army in the sixth century CE which caused divisions and the decentralization of military power.

What does this periodization tell us? It may explain that the disintegration of the Sāsānian Empire was not a simple process and in fact we can conceptualize three distinct periods between 628 CE and 651 CE. First there is a period of fratricide and loss of monarchic legitimacy. With the fratricide during Kawād's rule, most legitimate heirs were wiped out and so now other contenders chased the crown. This was followed by a second phase of factionalism and division. Now daughters and distant family members and generals gathered their own armies and vied for power and control of the Sasanian Empire. It appears that the Sasanian military became a more important force in controlling power than dynastic lineage. The third and last period is when Yazdgerd III came to the throne, where he ruled as a wandering king. By the seventh century, Iran had become divided and local politics and regional issues became paramount over state solidarity. During this turbulent time when no dynastic loyalty existed, local interests supplanted imperial order. Generals, local rulers, *dehqāns*, and contenders from the royal house were more interested in the protection of their towns, villages, domains or interests than in defending the empire. We know that the local rulers and the *dehqāns* made agreements with the Arab Muslim conquerors to pay *jizya* (tribute) rather than sacrifice the well-being of their people for a monarch who they no longer considered legitimate. The end was near and the Barbarized armies and the Barracks Kings made sure that the Sasanians would never rule again.

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