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## The VI Century eastern roman empire: Steppe allies, western turks, and herat war

Східна Римська імперія VI століття: степові союзники, західні турки та Гератська війна

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### Abstract

The subject of the Herat War and the Ctesiphon Peace Treaty of 591 is relevant since it reveals important aspects of the political, economic and military history. These events had a significant impact on the fates of the Byzantine Empire, the Persian Empire, and the Chinese Khaganate. The study of these events provides a more comprehensive understanding of the complex interrelationships and dynamics of Eastern politics. The academic paper also attempts to summarize the facts on the history of the “Herat War” of 589 from the standpoint of geopolitical analysis. This study involves analyzing historical sources including chronicles and archaeological data to reconstruct events and assess their consequences. The interpretation and analysis of documents and written sources of the time is also an important aspect in order to understand the motives and strategies of the parties involved in the events.

**Keywords:** Eastern Roman Empire, foederati, Battle of Herat, Turkic Khaganate, Ctesiphon Peace Treaty.

### Introduction

The events of 589 remain a mysterious episode of world diplomatic history. In fact, in the summer of 589, the first serious attempt to liquidate the Persian statehood of the Sassanid dynasty took place. The protagonists of this attempt were the outstanding generals Yang-Soukh-tegin and Bahram Chubin. The former, being the youngest son of the Turkic yabgu Kara-Churin-Turk, headed the Bukhara Khanate

### Анотація

Тема Гератської війни та Ктесифонського мирного договору 591 р. є актуальною, оскільки розкриває важливі аспекти політичної, економічної та військової історії. Ці події мали значний вплив на долі Візантійської імперії, Перської імперії та Китайського каганату. Вивчення цих подій дає змогу глибше зрозуміти складні взаємозв'язки та динаміку східної політики. У науковій статті також зроблено спробу узагальнити факти з історії “гератської війни” 589 року з точки зору геополітичного аналізу. Це дослідження передбачає аналіз історичних джерел, включаючи хроніки та археологічні дані, для реконструкції подій та оцінки їх наслідків. Інтерпретація та аналіз документів і письмових джерел того часу також є важливим аспектом для розуміння мотивів і стратегій сторін, причетних до подій.

**Ключові слова:** Східна Римська імперія, федерати, битва при Гераті, Тюркський каганат, Ктесифонський мирний договір.

(Narshakhi, 1897). The second led Persian contingents in a changeable campaign against the Byzantines in the lands of Azerbaijan and Miedia (Frendo, 1986). While holding the position of spahbad, during the 580s Bahram Chubin sluggishly opposed the Eastern Roman (Byzantine) contingents of Mauritius, who became emperor in 582. Having failed to show the proper zeal for the attack, Bahram Chubin,

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however, was memorable to the incumbent Persian emperor Ormizd Türkzadeh (579-590) as a talented organizer of defenses (Ferdowsi, 1989). The Iranian-Byzantine War (572-591) (Frendo, 1986), which lasted nineteen years, allowed the Eastern Roman army to approach the Iranian Plateau for the first time. In particular, the hostilities were taking place in Midia in 580-585 (Frendo, 1986). Byzantines came to the shores of the Caspian Sea, but adhering to the tactics of scorched earth, failed to win the proper favor of the local Zoroastrian population (Menander Protector, 1985). However, the strategic control over the Caspian Sea and the Derbent passage allowed the successful commander and judicious Emperor Mauritius (582-602) to strengthen the ties of official Constantinople with Sabirs, Khozars, Alans (Ossetians), Lazs and Iberians (Georgians). The western horde of the Turkic Khaganate, controlled by Yabg Kara-Churin-Turk, which had previously been in conflict with the Azov and Crimean cities of Byzantium (in 576-581) (Moravcsik, 1958), now also sought good relations with Mauritius.

### Literature review

Having examined the literature, it can be noted that Khairedinova and Shalyga in 2017 investigated Crimean Goths from the country of Dori from the middle of the III to VII century AD. Asoev (2016) investigated the role of Chinese sources when studying the political and religious history of Takharistan. Ayubov (2017) focused on the features of the evolution of Sogdian-Turkic relations in the early Middle Ages. Baratova (2004) studied the interaction of Byzantium, Sogdiana and the Türks on Central Asian coins. Braychevsky (2009) investigated the interaction of the Khazars. In 2017, he also examined the policies of the Muqan and Taspar (i.e.) Hagens in the Turkic Empire (553-581 AD). Gumilev studied different aspects of the history of the Turkic peoples and their wars in 1960, 1961 and 1962. In 2018. In 2016, Dossimbaeva reconstructed the history of the Türks in the context of sources on material and spiritual culture. The chosen fragments from the Anonymous Syriac Chronicle of 1234 AD were translated by N. Pigulevsky; they are contained in the collection "*Byzantium and Iran at the Turn of the VI and VII Centuries*". In 2018, Kalan studied the medieval Great Silk Road as the main trade route connecting Eastern Europe and Asia. In 2001, Klashortny analyzed Central Eurasia in the early Middle Ages, etc.

### Methodology

**Introduction:** The research outlined the historical background and the emergence of a potential reconciliation between the Türks in 588. The work explains the key defeat of the Persians against the Byzantine forces at Martyropolis in 588, which was the catalyst for improved relations between Mauritius and Kara-Churin. This explains the end of open civil strife in Central Asia and the subsequent restoration of a strong military and political alliance between Kara-Churin and the Eastern Roman Empire.

**Research Design:** The research design for this study includes a comprehensive approach to the study of historical events related to the reconciliation of the Türks and their alliance with the Eastern Roman Empire. The main objective is to analyze the factors that led to the reconciliation between the Türks and the Eastern Roman Empire, focusing on the events from 588 to 591. The study will provide a detailed analysis of the political, military, and economic circumstances prevailing in the region at the end of the 6th century, including the dynamics of relations between the Türks, the Eastern Roman Empire and other regional powers.

**Data Collection:** In order to carry out the study, a compilation of historical sources, both primary and secondary, was conducted to comprehend the events pertaining to the reconciliation of the Türks and their alliance with the Eastern Roman Empire. Research includes evaluating the reliability of sources, cross-referencing information, and examining archaeological evidence to supplement textual records.

**Data Analysis:** This study uses historical, critical, and comparative methods to interpret and analyze documents and written sources. Historical methods involve studying primary sources such as historical documents, chronicles, and inscriptions to reconstruct events and understand their context. Critical methods are used to assess the reliability, bias, and credibility of these sources, providing a rigorous evaluation of the evidence. Comparative methods allow you to compare different sources, perspectives, and interpretations to gain a deeper understanding of events and their consequences. Applying these approaches, the research aims to provide a comprehensive and detailed analysis of the studied historical events, highlighting their significance and consequences.

**Ethical considerations:** During the study of historical events depicted in the text, several

ethical considerations arise. Given the complexity of the political and military maneuvers described, it is necessary to ensure the accuracy of the analysis and refrain from distorting the facts to fit certain narratives. In addition, the study delves into the delicate historical contexts surrounding diplomatic negotiations, military campaigns, and power struggles between different actors. Hence, exercising caution and delicacy in addressing such subjects ensured consideration for the diverse perspectives and cultural nuances of the given era. The text also discusses the involvement of various ethnic and cultural groups, such as Turks, Persians, Byzantines, and Chinese. Cultural sensitivity was observed when analyzing these interactions, and steps were taken to prevent the perpetuation of stereotypes or prejudices.

**Validity Considerations:** The validity considerations in this historical narrative entail scrutinizing the reliability and authenticity of the sources cited, ensuring consistency and coherence within the accounts provided, contextualizing events within their historical context, employing robust analytical methods, and assessing the plausibility of proposed causal relationships. These elements are crucial for establishing the accuracy and credibility of the historical analysis presented.

**Limitations and Strengths:** In assessing the reliability of this historical study, several considerations emerge from the text. The strength of this study is the wide use of various sources, which provides a multifaceted study of the Eastern Roman Empire of the 6th century. However, there are certain limitations arising from inherent biases present in the historical records used, potential archival biases, and differences in data quality. Reliance on translated texts and interpretations creates the possibility of distorting or misrepresenting the information used in the research.

### **“Foederati” and “vassals”: steppe allies of Byzantium and China**

As early as 584, Mauritius signed a treaty with the Slavic Avars to confirm the federate status of the Avar Khaganate (558-805) (Melnyk, 2020c). Similar to Justinian the Great (527–565) (Menander Protector, 1985), Mauritius acknowledged the Avar Kagan as his legitimate subject and committed to upholding the Avar elite, who promised to support the Eastern Roman Empire with their forces. The federative treaty could indeed be considered a political

victory for Constantinople, if it were not for the predatory approach of the Avar elite. On the one hand, the Avars undertook to fight against the enemies of the Empire, but, on the other hand, the same Avars constantly terrorized the Roman provinces neighboring Pannonia, fighting predominantly Slavic hands (Heather, 2013). The policy of robbery and plunder seemed to Avar leaders the only way to keep the integrity of their Khaganate. After all, the Slavs, Germans and small Turkic-Mongolian cohorts, which were part of the Avar chiefdom, could act as a single entity only for the capture of spoils of war or for the sake of receiving a ransom for non-aggression (Sobestyansky, 1892).

The agreement of 584 stopped the large-scale war of the Byzantine Danubian army with the Slavo-Avars, but did not stop individual robbery forays from Pannonia. The federate position of the Slavo-Avars became a legal fiction that allowed Kagan Bayan (558/562-602) to withdraw allowances and precious gifts from the imperial treasury. Despite the instability of Byzantine relations with the Pannonian Khaganate, the elite of the Western Turkic horde considered any agreements between Constantinople and the Avars as a manifestation of duplicity and intrigue (Menander Protector, 1985: Fr. 45). The coordination of general military actions against Persia was postponed by Kara-Churin until the solution of the Avar issue and until the end of the turmoil within the Turkic possessions.

The civil war in the Turkic Khaganate covered almost the entire reign of Kagan Baga-Yshbar Khan (581-587) (Skaff, 2018: 390). In 584-587, the strife between Baga-Yshbar and Apa Khan, provoked by Sui China, broke out. Baga-Yshbara Khan recognized the suzerainty of China in order to defeat his personal enemy and for the sake of preserving the integrity of the Khaganat. The Turkic khagan had to pronounce corresponding oaths of loyalty in 584, 586 and 587 (Skaff, 2018: 390). This ensured his victory over Apa Khan's rebels in the battle of Bukhara, but did not save him from death in the Chinese steppes.

Following Baga-Ishbar, the suzerainty of the Sui emperor Wen-Di (581-604) was also recognized by the West Turkic yabgu Kara-Churin-Turk (in 586). Kara-Churin managed to rule in the West Turkic horde as an all-powerful and independent leader due to the recognized vassalage, not relying on the statements of the main Altaic stakes. In particular, the son of Kara-Churin named Yang-Soukh-tegin received the position

of the khan of Bukhara and the ruler of Paikend (Narshakhi, 1897: 13).

The power of Kara-Churin extended from the estuary of the Dnieper (modern Ukraine) (Braychevsky, 2009; Tishin, 2020) to the Khotan oasis (modern China) (Taşağıl, 2007: 242-248). All of Sogdiana belonged to Yabg, and the richest Bukhara oasis became the inheritance of his son (Skaff, 2002: 364-372). In Trans-Volga Eastern Europe and the Caucasus, the tribes of Byzantine foederati – Bulgars, Khozars, Ostgoths, Alans, Georgians, Sabirs, etc. – were subordinate to Yabg Kara-Churin. In the Caspian region, the main military and political force of Kara-Churin was composed of Oгуzes, who controlled the Volga delta and vast steppes of modern Kazakhstan (Bartold, 1964). The ethnically and religiously diverse population of Khorezm and the whole of Central Asia served as a tax base for the Kara-Churin government (Klyashtorny, 2001: 92-93). The agreement of Kara-Churin with Wen-Di in 586 formally meant the recognition of the rule of the Chinese Sui dynasty by the listed tribes. However, all the Eastern European and Caucasian tribes had federal treaties with the Eastern Roman Empire by 586, which were repeatedly confirmed in addition.

Sabirs, Crimean Ostgoths, Georgians, and Alans are known to have often assisted Byzantium with military contingents. The most vivid example is the Iranian-Byzantine war of 572-591. The tactical successes of Mauritius in 582-585 helped him establish the closest cooperation with the Christian North Caucasian peoples. Along with the Armenian militia, Georgian units participated in the Byzantine occupation of the lands of Azerbaijan (Frendo, 1986: III. 17.4) (as the territories belonging to the modern Republic of Azerbaijan and the present-day Azerbaijani provinces of the Islamic Republic of Iran). The activities of the Iberian archon Guaram Bagratid (572-602) were of great importance for Mauritius. By declaring himself king of Georgia, Guaram recognized the suzerainty of the Eastern Roman Empire (Suny, 1994: 23-25). His rear support helped Constantinople to carry out the occupation of a large number of Iranian territories in the early 580s.

According to the viewpoint of Gumilev, in 588 Guaram Bagratid turned out to be an intermediary between Emperor Mauritius and Yabgu Kara-Churin-Turk. A corresponding new round of Turkic-Byzantine negotiations became possible after the end of the Turkic civil war of 584-587.

The China-based orientation of Baga-Ishbar Khan (581-587), the rapid death of Cholla-Jabgu-Baga Khan (587-588) caused a deep need to restore the balance in the Turkic Khaganate. The function of reconciliation was assumed by the new kagan Yun-Ulug (588-599). Since his accession, Kagan has been actively engaged in opposing the Sinophiles' party, and has supported any anti-China or alternative pro-China position of the movement (Taşağıl, 2004). His main achievement was considered to be formal reconciliation with the Western Turkic horde and personally with Kara-Churin-Turk. Negotiations between Yun-Ulug and Kara-Churin lasted from 588 to 593 and culminated in the official peace treaty of 593, according to which Kara-Churin-Turk retained all the privileges he had gained during many years of political struggle. Kara-Churin remained the leader of the Western Horde; he received all benefits from Central Asian trade, and had military and political independence. Yun-Ulug in return was content with the formal title of Kagan and directed his efforts to centralize power in the Altai-Mongolian possessions of the Eastern Türkic Horde.

The Turkic agreement of 593 is similar in many ways to the Edict of Theodosius the Great, which divided the Roman Empire in 395. De jure, the Eastern and Western parts of the Roman Empire remained a single state with two emperors. De facto, the emperors tried to establish either an independent political reality or a common political space at the expense of each other's interests. Only one part survived in the end – the Eastern Roman Empire. Two hundred years later, the Turks found themselves in a similar situation. De jure, the Kagan and Jabgu witnessed the availability of a unified Khaganate in 593. De facto, the interests of Jabgu and Kagan more often contradicted each other. However, the agreement of 593 seemed to be the most important ideological step in the public consciousness of Turkic tribes and their vassals. One way or another, the hope for reconciliation of the Turks appeared in 588, when Yun-Ulug came to power. The defeat of the Persians by the Byzantine army at Martiropolis (588), in our opinion, accelerated the rapprochement between Mauritius and Kara-Churin. The end of the open civil war in Central Asia, as well as another aggravation in relations between the Byzantines and their Slavic-Avarian foederati, encouraged Kara-Churin to fully resume the military and political alliance with the Eastern Roman Empire. With the aforementioned mediation of the Georgian archon Guaram Bagratid, the planning of a general campaign against Persia



took place. Given the Byzantine successes near Martiropolis (588), Kara-Churin decided to open a “second front” against Sasanian Iran (Sorochan, 2016: 149). After the complete defeat of Persia, the Turks and Byzantines planned to meet and establish a common border (Nöldeke-Tabari, 1879: 268). The Byzantines were to be assisted by the North Caucasian peoples and the Khazars dependent on the Turks (Semenov, 2015: 285-286).

### **The Great Silk Road and the specifics of Turkic Poly-Vassalage**

As one can see, the Turkic Khaganate had no signs of a centralized state by 588 (Sadri, 2002: 195-198). Although this did not prevent the Turkic khagans, yabgas and khans under their control from maintaining iron discipline and law and order in the subordinate territories, the poly-vassalage mode of political existence of the khaganate corroded the Turkic politics from the inside. The Türks reluctantly split into parties, depending on the vectors of border trade that fed them.

In this context, the significant fact is that the Eastern European Turks and their vassals enjoyed the Byzantine status of foederati (Spivak, 2019: 129-130). Alans, Sabirs, Iberians, Lazs, Khazars, Ostgoths, Bulgars enjoyed Byzantine legal status long before the arrival of the Turks beyond the Volga (in 567) (Kovalevskaya, 1984: 134-136). The Turkic tribes did not violate the established social relations; they did not invade the sphere of customary law; they did not destroy the existing international relations. Consequently, the Eastern Roman Empire had enough power in the Eastern European steppe and the Caucasus, even in conditions of double subordination of the mentioned tribes – both to Constantinople and the Turkic Khaganate. During the intra-Turkic strife (570-580s) associated with the intensification of Chinese expansion (Sadri, 2002: 197), the existence of a powerful barrier of Iranian, Ugrian, Georgian, Germanic, and Turkic nationalities possessing ancient and well-established ties with the Eastern Roman Empire saved the Byzantines from a full-scale invasion of some Western Turkic tribes in the Balkans (Omasheva & Tanabaeva, 2017: 353).

In turn, the Oghuz of Kara-Churin and the Central Asian Turks were vassals of Sui China since 586. During the battle of Bukhara (587), this part of the Western Turkic horde fought under Sui banners and acted in cooperation with Chinese units. Previously, these same tribes,

including the oases of Sogdiana, also repeatedly recognized the suzerainty of the Persian Sasanid dynasty (Payne, 2013: 3-33). Actually, the penetration of the Turks into Central Asia was initially associated with the declaration of their pro-Persian orientation. However, the Turks soon realized that the Persians were solely competitors in the administration and taxation of transit trade (Çağlayan, 2020).

When characterizing the Central Asian system of poly-vassalage, one cannot ignore the West Turkic recognition of Byzantine suzerainty (567) (Menander Protector, 1985: Fr. 18). Although the Eastern Roman Empire was perceived by these Central Asian Turks more as a political ally, the Eastern Romans themselves did not share the status of their Khazar vassals and, for example, of the Oghuzes. One should bear in mind the fact that the Central Asian population, in addition to the established formal vassal dependence on Sui China, de jure recognized the presence of two authorities – the West Turkic Yabgu and the East Turkic Khagan (Plokhy, 2016: 72-73, 79). The situation certainly influenced the consciousness of ordinary warriors, merchants and farmers, since there were at least three or four supreme authorities for one person in different periods. Whose power was just? This natural question brought confusion into the social psychology of the multi-ethnic population of the Central Asian region.

The Eastern Turks of Altai were considered Chinese vassals since 584. The situation there looked somewhat more straightforward. Powerful Chinese and Turkic parties were formed. The first one saw the way out of the crisis in the complete absorption of the steppe by the Chinese. The second one, the most numerous, was looking for opportunities to acquire full sovereignty. The Chinese eventually managed to sow discord within the Turkic party and rally the Sinophiles around their protégés. After a series of civil wars, there was no trace left of the numerous admirers of Turkic independence. Thus, the Turkic Khaganate collapsed in 584-603 not in the most complex and poly-vassal Central Asia, but precisely in the centralized Altai-Mongolian nomads of the eastern Turks. The Khaganate was ruined by the proximity of the Chinese to the Altai stake and the desire of the ruling Ashin dynasty to join the benefits of Chinese culture.

In contrast to the Altai, poly-vassal Central Asia was brought together by the Great Silk Road (Ayubov, 2017: 27-35). Khotan, Kashgar, Bukhara, Paikend, Merv, Khorezm - these oases served not just as rich trading cities with vast

marketplaces (“bazaars”), but primarily as transit and transshipment hubs (Kalan, 2018).

Sui China did not desire centralization and good administration in the regions of Altai, Mongolia, or Manchuria since stabilization of the managerial elites of the Eastern Turks inevitably led to elaborate and organized interventions of the kagans in Chinese affairs, and threatened Turkic occupation of the whole of Northern China. That is precisely why Wen-Di devoted almost his entire reign to the disintegration of the eastern Turks, organizing various kinds of rebellions and strife among them (Sadri, 2002).

The Chinese acted exactly the contrary in the Central Asian possessions of the Western Turks. In this region, which was not directly adjacent to the densely populated areas of the Chinese Empire, the emissaries of Wen-Di helped the Turks to create an administrative apparatus and a well-functioning law enforcement system (Skaff, 2018: 386-399). The reason was the strategic importance of Central Asia for the Great Silk Road (Asoev, 2016: 82-89). That was why the Chinese supported the joint campaign of eastern and western Turks against Apa Khan in 587; that was why the Chinese did not prevent the establishment of the khan Yang-Soukh-tegin’s authority in Bukhara and Paikend.

The rapid development of Central Asia under Turkic rule created amazing prospects for Byzantine-Chinese economic cooperation. It is well-known that Wen-Di (581-604) had an outstanding political outlook and skillfully assessed the coming prospects. The 580s, thanks to his talent, broke Chinese fragmentation, instilled in the Chinese population a belief in their state, their messianic role. The Chinese never came into conflict with the Persians (Li, 2018: 238-241); however, the opportunity to destroy the mediator on the Great Silk Road probably seemed tempting to the Chinese government.

#### **Persian blockade of trade as a common threat to Byzantines and Chinese (hypothesis)**

A real threat to the growing and centralized Chinese economy in the 580s was the Persian conquest of Sogdiana. Iran deteriorated following the death of Khosrow Anushirvan (531-579) (Myshin, 2014: 469), but Persia did not give up its attempts to “regain” the lost Central Asian territories (Payne, 2013). The Turks were viewed by the Persians as invaders and usurpers (Çağlayan, 2020: 649-650). Accordingly, the Persians sent spies to Sogdiana,

using the network of Nestorian Christian communities for propaganda purposes. The attempts of the Turks to establish a trade route along the northern coast of the Caspian Sea up to the Danube caused fear and irritation of the Persians, which led to clashes on the southern shore of the Caspian Sea and jeopardized the whole system of transit of Chinese goods to Byzantium. However, one should not forget: Byzantine goods were also moving towards China. Reciprocal trade brought enrichment to the merchant classes of all Asian countries (Baratova, 2004: 415-422). Another, much longer Iranian-Byzantine conflict, which lasted from 572 until 591, prevented direct supplies of Chinese goods to Byzantium or Byzantine goods to China, disrupting reciprocal trade. The sea route and the voyage through India looked even more dangerous. The North Caspian and Black Sea route in the 570s-580s remained the last hope of Sino-Byzantine trade and, by default, the main means of enriching Sogdiana (Jäger, 1923: 81-231). However, the establishment of the new land route was very slow. The Persians tried to quarrel the Turks and Byzantines in every possible way; they helped ignite the military conflict around the Bosphorus of Cimmeria in 576-581, and played the Slavo-Avars card (Çağlayan, 2020: 649). The Slavo-Avars would not have attacked the Balkan provinces without Persian incitement. This incitement increased after 584 despite the confirmation of the Avar-Byzantine federation agreement. The worst situation was with the Slavic-Avar raids in the Subnistrain region. The subordination of the Antes to the Eastern Roman Empire, about which Justinian the Great made such a high-flown statement, was a pure formality, and the damage from the ruin of merchant routes was very substantial.

Balkan instability, Slavic-Avarian invasions, low population along the “northern” branch of the Silk Road – all these factors made the Turks, Byzantines and Chinese dream of resuming a direct route through the densely populated New Persian Shahinshahr (Eranshahr).

We believe that this situation, especially at the peak of Wen-Di’s military glory (588-589), could not but give rise to the idea of coordinating military efforts with Persia’s enemies to eliminate or transform it, aimed at resuming China’s full-fledged economic relations with Europe and the Middle East. Byzantium, in turn, constantly declared its openness to negotiations with any opponents of the Sassanid dynasty - from Ethiopian Aksumites to eastern Turks. Hypothetically, we assume that Byzantine

diplomats may have held meetings or consultations with representatives of Sui China. The public recognition by Yang-Soukh-tegin of his vassal allegiance to China is in favor of such an assumption. Needless to say, Wen-Di had an extensive network of intelligence and informants in all khan or princely states that recognized their subordination to the Chinese Empire. In addition to intelligence agents, Chang'an diplomats were sent to all Chinese vassals. For example, the ambassador Zhang-sun-sheng, who for many years fulfilled the duties of the imperial observer in the headquarters of the Eastern Turkic khagans (580s-590s), was one of them. Bukhara, with its strategic importance, after the overall Turkic-Chinese victory over Apa Khan in 587, possessed both a Chinese community within the city and Chinese diplomats in the bet of Yang-Soukh-tegin, whose rule of Bukhara, Paikend, and the surrounding oases began immediately after the brutal assassination of Apa Khan (Narshakhi, 1897: 13).

It is possible that hypothetical contacts between Eastern Roman and Chinese emissaries took place in the Bukhara oasis. Given the further development of events, such contacts or negotiations could have touched upon the need to reestablish the traditional routes of the Great Silk Road (Jäger, 1923). It was intended to exploit the West Turkic horde to thwart the Persians, who not only raised taxes and customs duties but also hindered the transportation of Chinese products through Turkic lands.

The Turks had the opportunity to attack the Persians either in conjunction with the Byzantines or in the Khorasan direction close to Bukhara and Khorezm. In the first case, the entire western horde would have crossed to the North Caucasus. In the second case, the Turks would have concentrated for a campaign in Sogdiana. The advantages of the second option are evident since the Persians could quickly figure out the movements of the Turkic cavalry to the west and be the first to strike the Turks in the rear – to capture Sogdiana, depriving the Western Horde of all economic power and many strategic advantages at once. The attack from the Caucasus, therefore, was supposed to be carried out by the Poly-vassal Khazars).

The political interests of Wen-Di and Mauritius were united, among other things, in the mentioned poly-vassalage of the Turks. The two Turkic hordes recognized the suzerainty of China, but most of the tribes of the western horde were in the zone of Eastern Roman influence, enjoying the regime of the right of foedus

(Melnyk, 2020b: 147-148). The West Turkic Horde, de jure subordinated to the Suis, Byzantines and the Altai Kagan, seemed to contemporaries a good place for establishing cultural, economic and diplomatic contacts (Baratova, 2004: 415-422; Babayarov & Kubatin, 2013: 47-58). Central Asia in this sense turned out to be a valuable melting pot for both the Chinese and the Eastern Romans. The loss of Central Asia by the Turks in favor of Iran threatened terrible losses to rapidly developing China and Byzantium, eager to recover from the crisis. Accordingly, the offensive of the Turks in the Khorasan direction was planned to counterbalance the Caucasian front of the Khazars, as well as the performance of the main Byzantine army in the Mesopotamian Theater of military operations (Ferdowsi, 1989: 250).

In case our assumption about the possibility of Byzantine-Sui diplomatic contacts is true, the authorized persons could well have agreed both on war with Persia and the division of the poly-vassal Turkic Khaganate into conditional Chinese and Byzantine zones of influence. First of all, the diplomatic discourse would have concerned economic influence - organization of control over safe transportation of products. Many later Persian authors also hint at the existence of an agreement between the Eastern Romans and Western Turks on the full division of Sassanid Eranshahr (Ferdowsi, 1989: 250). Persian sources quite rightly note that the nature of planning and the scale of the military operation in 589 testify in favor of the existence of a plan for the destruction of Iranian statehood (Pourshariati, 2008). The notorious message of Yang-Soukh-tegin Khan to Shahinshah Ormizd Turkzadeh (579-590) directly indicates, according to the classic of Iranian literature at Tabari, the desire of the Western Turks to seize Ctesiphon (Nöldeke-Tabari, 1879: 268).

### **The joint military campaign of the Turks and Byzantines (589)**

Stepping back from hypothetical reflections, it is possible to conclude that the course of hostilities in 589 confirmed the desire of Byzantines and Turks to establish a common border along the supposed partition line of Persia (Gumilev, 1961). In addition, the main interested parties and obviously the initiators of the war were the Eastern Roman Empire and Sui China since the Chinese path to “free” trade with Europe and the Middle East lay solely through the destruction or fragmentation of Iran.

The year 589 seemed to the rulers of the above countries favorable for a general performance. In the preceding 588, the Byzantines had defeated the Persians, the western Turks had stopped fighting with the eastern ones and the Chinese successfully suppressed the resistance of separatists in the south and eastern Turks in the north. Persia, led by Ormizd Türkzadeh, went on the defensive along the entire perimeter of its borders (Pourshariati, 2008: 126). The chronicler at-Tabari wrote about the situation as follows: “the enemies surrounded Persia like the bowstring ends of a bow” (Nöldeke-Tabari, 1879: 270).

The hostilities began in the spring of 589 (Ferdowsi, 1989: 249-250). Byzantine troops captured and destroyed the fortress of Okba on the central section of the front. They were supported from the south by Arab federates under the command of Abbas the Crooked and Amr the Blue-Eyed, whose units captured many Persian caravans and plundered much of present-day Iraq (Nöldeke-Tabari, 1879: 270). The Khazar invasion through the Daryal Gorge helped the Byzantines from the north (Ferdowsi, 1989: 250). On May 5, 589 the Khazars entered Atropatena and devastated the strategic region of the southern coast of the Caspian Sea in May-July.

Iranian units managed to clear the northwestern regions from the Khazars in July; however, a new army consisting of Byzantine federates (Ossetians, Dzurduks, Didoians) entered Iran through the Caucasus Gate. These units were subordinate to the centurions of Guaram Bagratid (571-602). Apart from the Federates themselves, the new corps apparently included a large number of Georgian volunteers (Brosset, 1849). It should be noted that Archon Guaram Bagratid received the court rank of kouropalat from Mauritius in gratitude for organizing diplomatic negotiations between Constantinople and Kara-Churin-Turk and for preparing the South Caspian campaign (Semenov, 2015: 280). The Georgians showed themselves to be experienced and skillful fighters and performed the functions of control over the federates of the North Caucasus. At this point, Guaram claimed to cede large areas of the North and East Caucasus to Georgia. Probably, in case of armed success, the Byzantines would have given Atropatena to the Bagratid dynasty (Brosset, 1849: 220-221). However, a prolonged war (since 572) and recent Khazar plundering destroyed the economy of the Caspian lands (Menander Protector, 1985: Fr. 61). The Foederati and Georgians managed to gain a foothold in the new territories, but there

were complications with food and defense communications. According to the Armenian historian Sebeos, in order to support Bagratid, the Byzantines had to send a third military contingent to eastern Transcaucasia – a detachment of cavalry led by General Romanus (Sebeos, 2007: 33).

### **On the “personality factor” in history: the ascendance of Spahbad Bahram Chubin**

The successes of Roman and Guaram coincided in time with the opening of the second front by the western Turks (Ferdowsi, 1989: 250). The invasion of the Iranian province of Khorasan from the area of Turkic Bukhara began in the first days of August 589. At the same time, Ormizd Türkzade (579-590) convened a general council of Persian marzpan (viceroys, governors and officials of the vizir’s divan) in the capital Ctesiphon. According to Ferdowsi, this council changed the strained relations between the shahinshah and the nobility (Ferdowsi, 1989: 247-252). Ormizd Türkzade had to ask for the help of retired officials and generals of the era of Khosrow Anushirvan (531-579). The patrimonial aristocracy oriented Ormizd towards reconciliation with Zoroastrian Mobeds (priests). One of the Mobeds even spoke at the council (Ferdowsi, VI 1989: 251). The Mobeds now had the word, and at the same time the hope of restoring Zoroastrian influence. Their position came down to an immediate war against the Western Turkic horde. Ferdowsi wrote as follows: “If the Turk from Jeyhun (Amu Darya - V.M.), threatening with war, has come, we must not delay a moment” (Ferdowsi, 1989: 251). The invasion of the Turks posed a threat to the entire Iranian statehood, since the forces concentrated by Yang-Soukh-tegin far exceeded the Byzantines in numbers, freshness and fighting spirit. The Yang-Soukh Türks did not, in contrast to the eastern Romans, wage a protracted war. They did not demand peace from the authorities, but only victory. In addition, Yang-Soukh gathered a large force of archers from the entire Western Turkic horde. Opposition to the Turkic armies forced the Persians to use other methods of military tactics and strategy than they had been accustomed to during the many years of conflicts with Constantinople. Khazars, Arabs and Byzantines, according to the Mobed lobby, did not pose such a strategic danger (Ferdowsi, 1989: 250, 252). On the one hand, according to the Mobeds’ position, the Byzantines were exhausted from years of war and were happily awaiting any peaceful initiative. Accordingly, “it would be urgent to make peace with Byzantium by ceding the disputed areas” (Ferdowsi, 1989:



252). On the other hand, the Arabs, as Ormizd's advisers noticed, would not be able to resist the gold and would betray their Byzantine allies. On the third hand, the Khazars and Caucasian federates themselves would flee if their kin (Western Turks) were defeated on the eastern front (Nöldeke-Tabari, 1879: 269-270). When Ormizd asked the audience who was capable of leading the resistance to Yang-Sawh-tegin in the eastern direction, he received a direct proposal to appoint Spahbad Bahram Chubin (Ferdowsi, 1989: 254).

As early as 572, Chubin participated in the siege of Byzantine Dara (Pourshariati, 2008: 125); then he commanded the occupation forces of Eranshahr in Armenia (Kulakovsky, 1996: 350). Khosrow Anushirvan considered Chubin as a successful commander. However, chronicles have not brought to our knowledge any information about any outstanding victories of Bahram Chubin. Chubin's leadership in the Midian section in the initial times of Mauritius' reign led the front to disaster and favored the victories of Byzantine arms. It is quite likely that Chubin, whom Iranian sources call "the old warrior", represented the interests of the disgruntled aristocracy. The transfer of a combat-ready army into his hands could act as a factor of further intimidation of the intransigent Sassanid Shahinshah. However, Ormizd's fright was enough and he did not hesitate to give the post of commander-in-chief into the hands of a disloyal commander at the crisis moment. The presence of the Mobeds at the council, the call to service of the "old" Bahram Chubin, the nature of communication between the Shahinshah and his entourage – all this suggests that the ruler of Persia tried to make peace with the hostile tribal nobility.

As a result of the general council, Ormizd Türkzade ordered to give Bahram Chubin all the lists of the military divan (general staff) in order that the newly appointed commander could choose the units he would command (Ferdowsi, 1989: 258). Such a move was also uncharacteristic of Ormizd's early style of ruling. However, Chubin refused to use "cadre" units of the Persian army. He stated that the army was to be composed exclusively of men between 40 and 50 years of age with experience in warfare (Ferdowsi, 1989: 259). Having selected a detachment of 12,000 men, Chubin requested from the divan also oil installations for "throwing fire".

The ages from 40 to 50 years evidence that Bahram Chubin bet on mounted archers:

It is easy to explain why Bahram preferred the elderly to the young. Archers were the dominant force at the time, as was already mentioned, and it took at least 20 years to become proficient shooters. Shooting, not hand-to-hand combat, decided the fate of the battle. Persian archers reached the pinnacle of skill by the VI century and drew the bowstring not to the chest, but to the ear. The arrow flew for 700 meters and, being equipped with a well-tempered tip, pierced through the shell (Gumilev, 1961).

Gumilev is echoed by contemporary American historian Lyutvak, who describes in detail the IV-VII centuries as the era of archery battles. Since Hunnic times, the compound bow with a reverse bend, striking the enemy in incredibly distant places, was considered the "god of war". An advantage in the number of trained mounted archers always meant the availability of an advantage in initial battle planning (Melnyk 2018: 9-13). The only problem was, as Gumilev correctly pointed out, that good archers were both old and battle-hardened fighters. Hence, Chubin's move was not escapist.

After all, this possibility should not be dismissed: the army recruited by Bahram Chubin could at any time march against Shahinshah Ormizd (Ferdowsi, 1989: 263). However, to begin with, Chubin and the Marzpanes who supported him needed only a victory over the Western Turks. Any internal political discussions and quarrels were meaningless without this victory. In this case, the interests of the Shahinshah coincided with the interests of the hostile nobility. Contemporaries understood very well the complex of political, economic and military goals pursued by the interventionists (Tolstov, 1938: 3-39).

### **The Battle of Herat (August 589)**

The Persian army could not, in contrast to the Turks, completely redeploy to Khorasan. The western front and the need to guard the huge perimeter of the border hindered it. In parallel with the invasion of the Byzantines in the west and the Turks in the east, a Kushan rebellion started along the southeastern border of Eranshahr (in the Indian regions of Khorasan). The Kushans, close in spirit and culture to the Indians, tried to escape from the Shahinshah's tutelage (Sebeos, 2007: 70). Since "trouble never comes alone", the official Ctesiphon could not use even frontier "Indian" contingents against the Turks. All hopes rested solely on Bahram Chubin's modest veteran corps of 12,000 warriors.

At-Tabari estimates the invading West Turkic army at 300 thousand men and about 200 war elephants (Nöldeke-Tabari, 1879: 269). Ferdowsi, writing later, assures that the army consisted of over 400,000 men and 1,200 elephants (Ferdowsi, 1989: 250). At-Tabari is probably right, given that the Western Turks attacked Persia not to plunder but to destroy it. At-Tabari gives data about sending a message to Ormizd Türkzade by Yang-Soukh-tegin. The special envoy brought the following words to the Shahinshah:

Fix bridges over streams and rivers so that I could enter your country using them, and build bridges over the rivers that do not have them. Do the same with the rivers and streams through which my road leads from your country to the Rumians (Romans - V. M.) since I intend to pass to them through your country (Nöldeke-Tabari, 1879: 268).

Gumilev believed that “the text of the ultimatum shows both the true purpose of the campaign and the coordination of actions of the Western Turks and Greeks”. We fully agree with the opinion of Gumilev (Gumilev, 1961) and who supported him, honoring their talents as interpreters. Prior to Gumilev, none of the researchers, despite the abundance of indications by Ferdowsi and at-Tabari, dared to interpret Yang-Soukh-tegin’s appeal (Ferdowsi, 1989: 250) as a desire, first of all, to conquer Persia. Scholars assessed this action as another “barbarian” raid, and the descriptions of later Persian historians were considered “typical exaggerations” (Chavannes, 1900: 242-243; Semenov, 2015: 284-286). It seems to us that such a viewpoint is outdated, and the available data allow us to determine the goals and intentions of the Western Turks. Firstly, Yang-Soukh-tegin wanted to destroy the reserves of the Sasanian army, not involved in repulsing Byzantine attacks, and, secondly, the Turks were eager to reach the line of contact with the Byzantines (Ferdowsi, 1989: 250). In case of success of the campaign, Persia would quite reasonably cease to exist (at least in its Sassanid format – from the Caspian Sea to the Persian Gulf). Such success could only be guaranteed by the large number of invading troops. Consequently, the contingent of 300,000 people is not a fiction, but a calculation of all the resources used by the Turks (cavalry, auxiliary infantry forces, service of war elephants, technical personnel and rear service; we consider possible participation of some Sui and Eastern Turkic units that remained in Bukhara and Paikend since the campaign against Apa Khan (Narshakhi, 1897: 12-13).

The intervention of the contingents of Yang-Sawh-tegin turned the nearly seventy thousand Iranian troops concentrated in the northeastern part of the country into a rout. A few battles were enough for the Turks to break the resistance of Iranian outposts and seize several strategic roads along the trade route. A free passage to Khorasan (to the west) and Tokharistan (to the east) opened before Yang-Sawh-tegin. His forces divided, slowly moving forward. The vanguard of the army moved into Khorasan, where the leading troops planned to capture the fortified cities of Herat and Balkh (Nöldeke-Tabari, 1879: 269).

In response to the daring letter of Yang-Soukh-tegin, Ormizd Türkzade sent to the Bukhara Khan his envoy named Khurrad Burzin. This intelligence agent was obliged to make every effort to detach the khan with a small force from the main army and lure him into a trap prepared by Bahram Chubin in one of the Khorasan gorges. Probably, Khurrad Burzin tried not only to stall the time by fictitious negotiations on peace, but also tried to pretend to be a personal enemy of the Shahinshah. Relatively quickly he won the trust of the Bukhara Khan and even moved freely in the Turkic military camp. In the end, having successfully accomplished the mission assigned to him, Khurrad Burzin escaped unhindered (Ferdowsi, 1989: 264-265).

Yang-Soukh-tegin, guided by the advice of the “defector” Burzin, took only a 20,000-strong detachment of cavalry with him and moved directly to Herat along the course of the Gerirud River. It seems likely that Yang-Soukh-tegin wanted to capture the powerful Herat fortress as soon as possible, setting up his headquarters there and waiting for the main forces. When he reached Herat, Bahram Chubin’s corps was already standing in the way of the Turks, while a narrow mountain gorge loomed behind. The place for the battle seemed extremely unfavorable and Bukhara khan made another attempt to negotiate with the potential “enemy” of the Shahinshah (Ferdowsi, 1989: 266-268). Yang-Soukh sent messengers to Chubin with an offer of the title of Iranian ruler and, which is characteristic for understanding the essence of the Turkic invasion, “a second place beside himself” (Ferdowsi, 1989: 270).

According to Ferdowsi, not all Persian commanders supported Chubin’s ultimate decision to enter the battle (Ferdowsi, 1989: 272-273). The very same Hurrad Burzin, who was a personal spy of Ormizd Türkzadeh, encouraged Chubin to accept the tempting offers of the Bukhara khan (Nöldeke-Tabari, 1879: 271). It

may very well be that Bahram Chubin himself had for some time been contemplating cooperation with Yang-Sawh-tegin against Ormizd. However, the Turkic occupation would undoubtedly deprive Chubin of the support of aristocratic circles, while the favorable geographical position of the Persian army gave it a chance to destroy the main command of the Turks and thus frustrate all the plans of the invading horde. In the latter case, Chubin counted on the nationwide recognition and respect of the aristocracy. As can be seen from the following, the old commander was not mistaken.

At the end of August 589, the Battle of Herat took place (Gumilev, 1961). Pressed into a narrow gorge, the Turks fought very fiercely, forcing the first ranks of the invading Persians to flee (Ferdowsi, 1989: 275). For this case, Bahram Chubin prepared barrier detachments that met the fugitives from the side of Herat. However, the tactical retreat undertaken by Chubin encountered an elevated terrain that did not allow an organized and close-order retreat (Gumilev, 1961). The attack of the Turks was repulsed by the coordinated actions of Iranian archers who were shooting at the elephants (Ferdowsi, 1989: 276). The pride of the West Turkic army, the fighting elephants, trampled the formation of the Turks. Due to the resulting confusion, Bahram Chubin undertook a counterattack and, according to sources, personally shot Yang-Soukh-tegin with a bow (Ferdowsi, 1989: 277). The death of the Khan sowed terror among the Turkic ranks. Warriors began to flee to the gorge, where there was a fatal crush, reinforced by no less deadly fire of Iranian archers. Thus, out of the 20,000-strong detachment of Yang-Soukh-tegin, only a tenth of them managed to get back through the gorge (Ferdowsi, 1989: 277). At-Tabari would later write about it: "Persia was saved by Bahram Chubin's shot" (Nöldeke-Tabari, 1879: 271).

The tactical mistake of Yang-Soukh-tegin, who trusted Persian defectors, had strategic consequences. The main armies of the Western Turks were scattered in the sands of Khorasan and the valleys of Tokharistan. The numerical and technological advantage of the Turks was overshadowed by the problem of lack of leadership. Considerable forces, according to Persian chroniclers, were subordinated to Yang-Soukh's son Il-tegin-Buyuruk (the Chinese called him "Nili Khan" (Narshakhi, 1897: 14), and the Persians wrote "Parmuda") (Ferdowsi, 1989: 280-281). We assume that not all the khan's troops supported the new leader. Apparently, part of the Turkic army was engaged

in salvaging the looted riches. Jewels, captives and weapons captured during the initial flight of the 70,000-strong Persian contingent should have been transported to Sogdiana under Turkic control. In addition, large forces of Turks remained in mountainous Tokharistan, where they initially hoped to unite with the Kushites, but, in the end, simply plundered the settlements they encountered along the way.

### **The Battle of Herat (August 589)**

In September 589, the hostilities broke out with new fierceness. Part of the Turks fled, and Il-tegin-Buyuruk tried to organize guerrilla warfare on the left bank of the Amu Darya. We attribute Bahram Chubin's offensive to the coming of the southeastern Sasanian troops. This army crushed the weakly organized defense of Il-tegin-Buyuruk by crossing the Amu Darya. Most of the loyal companions abandoned their khan and only the most loyal vigilantes encamped together with Il-tegin near Paikend (a place located 30 km from Bukhara).

The new battle is described in Ferdowsi's "Shahnameh" (Ferdowsi, 1989: 283-285). It took place at night and forced Khan to start the defense of the fortress of Avaz. Chubin's Persians, using standard siege techniques, deprived the defenders of water and cut off the ways for the arrival of reinforcements. After several rounds of negotiations, the Avaz garrison surrendered in exchange for keeping the khan's soldiers alive (Ferdowsi, 1989: 286-295). Il-tegin-Buyuruk paid for the lives of his vigilantes by voluntary captivity and official surrender in the presence of Ormizd Türkzade. The interesting fact is that Ormizd, the son of a Turkic woman accepted Il-tegin as a relative; he arranged official celebrations in his honor and granted the Bukhara khan the status of an honorary prisoner (Ferdowsi, 1989: 295). Up to 593, the son of Yang-Soukh stayed in Ctesiphon as a pledge of non-aggression of the Western Turks under the command of Kara-Churin. The life of Kara-Churin's grandson was valued very dearly and he was regarded as a real contender for the position of Kagan. In 593, he returned to the nomads of his grandfather and even managed to be the Western Turkic khagan in 603-604 (Telitsyn, 2020: 217-218).

The Byzantine troops of the commander Romanus, who were constraining Atropathena and Midia, became another target of Ormizd (Frendo, 1986: III. 6.8). Having captured such a valuable prisoner as Il-tegin-Buyuruk, Ormizd did not hesitate and, having secured peace

guarantees from the West Turkic yabgu, transferred Bahram Chubin's corps directly to the Transcaucasian front. Beforehand, the Persians bribed Arabian archons (sheikhs) and spread rumors about the defeat of the Khaganate among the Caucasians. The flight of the Foederati led Roman's Greco-Georgian units into encirclement. However, General Roman's withdrawal from the encirclement brought both troops face to face. Despite the betrayal of the Foederati (Brosset, 1849: 221), the Byzantines granted the Persians a general battle on the Arax River. Bahram Chubin already lost this battle after falling into a skillfully prepared trap. The complete defeat of his units seems to be a good compensation to the Turkic allies for the defeat of Yang-Soukh-tegin.

### **Bahram Chubin's mutiny levels the Persian gains**

The Eastern Romans were unable to completely nullify the Heratian victory of the Persians because of Il-tegin-Buyuruk's captivity. However, the monstrous defeat of Bahram Chubin's "veterans" put Iran in a difficult domestic political situation. Emboldened by the murder of Yang-Soukh-tegin and capture of Il-tegin-Buyuruk, Ormizd Türkzade ordered to transfer Chubin's army to Transcaucasia as soon as possible. Consequently, Bahram Chubin did not send the due share of the booty captured in the Bukhara oasis to the Shahinshah (Ferdowsi, 1989: 296-297). In addition to financial disadvantage, Ormizd understood the aristocratic intentions to use "his" Bahram Chubin to suppress the autocratic regime of the Shahinshah. To put it simply, the patrimonial nobility really hated Ormizd for his autonomy and brutal repressive measures against treasury thieves (Pourshariati, 2008: 118-119). The Turkic origin of the Shahinshah (on his mother's side) only strengthened the anger accumulated over the years.

Being in a hopeless situation, when the Western Turks attacked Khorasan, Ormizd made a temporary alliance with the hostile nobility. However, the defeat of Bahram Chubin gave the Shahinshah a chance to get rid of a potential rival. "The King of Kings" declared Chubin guilty of defeat, sent the warlord an order to strip him of his title of commander-in-chief, accompanied by a spinning wheel and women's clothes (Frendo, 1986: III. 7.13-19). The ambassadors wanted to take Chubin to Ctesiphon, but the warlord flatly refused to obey the Shahinshah. Around October-November 589, Bahram Chubin wrote a letter to Ormizd with personal insults and declaration of

war (Ferdowsi, 1989: 313). Chubin praised "the old Shah Khosrow" and scolded "the new Shah, who was the daughter rather than the son of Anushirvan" (Frendo, 1986: III. 8.3).

The mature general Bahram Chubin turned out to be a well-calculated politician. He gathered his troops and gave them a speech in which he accused Ormizd of collusion with the enemies of Persia, of his greed and desire to take away all the riches looted by the soldiers in previous campaigns. The soldiers were particularly affected by Chubin's false assurances about the existence of Ormizd's order to deprive the army of the state salary. The rebellion covered the entire western front line (Ferdowsi, 1989: 302-305). This allowed the Byzantines to regroup and gather new forces. After the fall withdrawal, Constantinople lost the Mysian and Atropatene territories, turning out to be along the frontier line approved as early as the Peace Treaty of 562 (signed by Justinian and Khosrow Anushirvan (Bajoni, 2018: 353-371)). By the beginning of the winter of 589/590, there was an apparent "draw" between Ormizd, on the one hand, and Mauritius/Kara-Churin-Turk, on the other hand. One of the Turkic heirs to the throne was in Persian captivity, and the Byzantine armies were exhausted in the fierce battles of 589. Constantinople lost the opportunity to use the Turkic invasion to destroy Persia, which forced the emperor to intensify economic diplomacy in the North Caspian direction. However, his wait-and-see attitude regarding Bahram Chubin's rebellion bore unexpected political fruit (Frendo, 1986: III. 8.12).

While Bahram Chubin was gathering troops in the west of the country, in Ctesiphon, aristocratic conspirators released one of the Shahinshah's relatives, Bindoi, from prison. Bindoi organized a rebellion in the capital and stormed the Shahinshah's palace on February 6, 590. The "King of Kings" was brutally tortured and killed, and all his relatives were executed at the same time (Ferdowsi, 1989: 320-321). Only one of Ormizd's sons, who was also the nephew of the rebel Bindoi – Khosrow II Parviz (Shahinshah in 590-628) – survived (Pourshariati, 2008: 130-131). Bindoy-Khosrow's government resumed negotiations with the other rebels (Bahram Chubin's group), offering Chubin the post of vizir. In turn, Bahram Chubin opposed the new government and publicly declared his intention to overthrow the entire Sassanid dynasty that had ruled Persia since 224 (Ferdowsi, 1989: 335-336).



### **The alliance of Khosrow II Parviz with the Byzantine Emperor Mauritius**

In the spring of 590, Bahram Chubin's army defeated the armies of Bindoi and Khosrow II Parviz on the Great Zab River (modern Iraq) (Frendo, 1986: IV. 9.3). On March 9, 590, Chubin crowned himself the "King of Kings", proclaiming the era of the Mihran dynasty (Ferdowsi, 1989: 359-360). The main Ktesiphon prisoner, Il-tegin-Buyuruk, was also at his disposal. It is characteristic that not a single hair fell from the head of the Turkic "tsarevitch" in this case, too.

Having withdrawn with a group of thirty soldiers, the Shahinshah fled to the Eastern Roman border fortress of Kirkesia (Ferdowsi, 1989: 367-368). There is an assumption that already at that time Khosrow II Parviz accepted Christianity (Frendo, 1986: IV. 10.1-4) of the Monophysite persuasion and had predominantly Monophysite Armenians in his entourage. Probably, it was Armenians who advised the Shahinshah to ask Emperor Mauritius for help. The correspondence of Khosrow II with Mauritius testifies that the Iranian Shahinshah was really in a desperate situation (Ferdowsi, 1989: 371-382). He promised the Eastern Roman Empire to "forever" renounce all of Transcaucasia and claims to Armenia, and not to interfere with Byzantine frontier fortresses in Mesopotamia and Syria (Ferdowsi, 1989: 380-382). Khosrow wrote to Mauritius about his readiness to conclude "peace on any terms", noting that if the emperor found his offers not generous enough, the emperor himself could "add in his wisdom the missing". Most interestingly, the usurper Chubin also conducted parallel negotiations with Mauritius, sending the emperor an offer to "cede all Mesopotamia as far as the Tigris". It is possible that Chubin promised Atropatene as well; however, Mauritius, after months of deliberation, decided not to detach excessive territories from Iran (Frendo, 1986: IV. 14.9). Byzantium's own coffers left much to be desired and new lands with hostile populations, after the costly campaign of 589, could become a burden. Constantinople placed its final bet on Khosrow and on a policy of weakening Iran as a whole.

By March 591, Khosrow II Parviz received from Constantinople 1400 kg of gold and a corps of cavalry under the command of the Armenian general Narses. Ferdowsi also points to the fact of marriage of Khosrow and Mauritius' daughter Maria (Ferdowsi, 1989: 381, 389) (Byzantine sources do not mention this fact). In response, having entered the territory of Eranshahr,

Khosrow immediately handed over to Mauritius the symbolic keys to the fortress of Dara, without putting forward any diplomatic conditions. Most of the border towns, populated predominantly by Nestorian Christians, welcomed Khosrow as a liberator, since the military dictatorship of the "Mihran era" led to even greater repression than the reign of Ormizd Türkzadeh.

By the summer of 591, Byzantine troops led by the Iranian Shahinshah captured the Persian capital Ctesiphon and took control of the capital region. The local inhabitants of the Christian faith (for example, in Khosrow's city of Antioch Christians made up the overwhelming majority of the population) welcomed the Byzantines as liberators, hoping for the "final" fall of Persian power. Soon, the Byzantine-Iranian contingents of Khosrow II Parviz united with the fresh troops of the Byzantine commander John Mistakon not far from the capital. Further, the 60,000-strong army of Khosrow, Narses, and John gave battle to Bahram Chubin's 40,000-strong corps, destroying the enemy and forcing the usurper to flee to the Far East (Ferdowsi, 1989: 408-410, 418-441).

The triumphant return of Narses, John, and Khosrow to Ctesiphon was accompanied by the signing of the Ctesiphon Peace Treaty of 591.

### **The essence and significance of the Ctesiphon Peace Treaty of 591**

The war, which de jure had lasted since 572, was declared officially over. Almost the whole of Armenia was recognized as Byzantine; Persia gave up Dara and Martiropolis forever, and the official Ctesiphon was now to finance the protection of the Derbent Passage on its own. Persia was obliged to pay Mauritius a large monetary reward. However, the main condition of the Ctesiphon Peace was that Iran regained freedom of movement along the Great Silk Road. East Roman merchants were exempted from customs duties, received state benefits and the opportunity to move freely, under armed guard, to Sogdiana. In order to protect Khosrow from possible plots, Mauritius even sent him a personal guard of one thousand soldiers. In addition to getting married to a Constantinople princess, Khosrow even recognized Emperor Mauritius as his legal father. The procedure of Khosrow Parviz's adoption by Mauritius took place (Theophanes, 1839: 588-589). The Byzantine general Narses said to the Shahinshah after the treaty was signed, "You should remember, this day, Khosrow! The Romans are giving you victory". The modern historian

Peter Heather writes about this event, “significant acquisitions in the Caucasus gave the Romans strategic control over the far ends of the passes through the Zagros Mountains that led directly into the economic center of the Persian Empire between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers; it was a knife thrust over the Persians’ most vulnerable spot” (Heather, 2013: 249).

### Discussion

In any case, the Ctesiphon Peace Treaty of 591 was directed not so much at the territorial expansion of Byzantium into Persia, but at the intensification of trade with Central Asia and the Far East. The Persians fell into a position of dependence on the eastern Romans. Shahinshah Khosrow II Parviz was now de jure regarded as a son of Mauritius; he was his son-in-law, and was guarded in his palace by Greek soldiers.

Many Byzantine chroniclers, as noted above, considered Khosrow a Christian (Frendo, 1986: IV. 10.1-4). In any case, in addition to Mary, Khosrow was definitely married to the Armenian Monophysite Shirin. Her influence on state affairs led to the consolidation of the position of the Nestorians and Monophysites. The Ctesiphon patriarchate was given a privileged position at the court of Khosrow II Parviz. The Shahinshah donated a lot of money for monasteries and churches to Christians of various denominations (Frendo, 1986: V. 14.2-11). Economic relief was also granted to the orthodox Chalcedonian Christians who shared control over the South Caspian trade routes with the Nestorians and Monophysites.

On the one hand, Persia was regaining its ancient status as an intermediary between the Far East and the Mediterranean. On the other hand, the ruling Sassanid dynasty made Persia politically dependent on Constantinople. Consequently, the Ctesiphon Peace recorded the victory of the Eastern Roman Empire and, at the same time, was beneficial to Sui China. Although the Ctesiphon Treaty, called by Heather a “Versailles moment” (Heather, 2013: 249-250), did contribute to the birth of revanchist sentiments among the Persians, its significance for the period 591-602 can hardly be overestimated. An entire decade of peace on the eastern frontier of Byzantium (the western frontier of Eranshahr) took place for the first time in the seventy-year period.

The extent and significance of the victory of the Eastern Roman Empire in the war of 572-591 is evidenced by the embassy of the Merovingian

king Hildebert II (570-596) to Constantinople (Theophanes, 1839: 591). The Franks, who had previously been very sluggish in helping the Byzantines, intensified their campaigns against the Lombards in Italy. Consequently, the Ctesiphon victory helped Mauritius to focus his attention on relations with the Slavo-Avars in the Balkans and with the Franks in northern Italy (Theophanes, 1839: 593). Up until 602, the Eastern Roman Empire undertook successful military and diplomatic operations on all European fronts. The Franks at this time were an effective instrument of Byzantine policy, continuing the tradition (Melnyk, 2020a: 228-244) established a century earlier.

“Shahinshah” of the “Mihran dynasty”, Bahram Chubin, after a military defeat, abandoned his relatives and fled to Altai, where he surrendered to the Eastern Turkic kagan Yun-Ulug. Ferdowsi reports that Bahram Chubin was killed by Persian spies in approximately 592 (Ferdowsi, 1989: 437). From our standpoint, such an assassination in the Eastern Turkic possessions could have been accomplished with Chinese help. Firstly, the Sui dynasty did not want a renewal of the civil war in Iran. Bahram Chubin, on the other hand, actively urged Yun-Ulug to help him with troops. Secondly, only the Sinophile party could go against Yun-Ulug’s will. After all, the Kagan made Bahram Chubin a particularly close official and personal advisor.

### Conclusions

The Herat War of 589 was extremely profitable for China since Chinese silks and porcelain became profitable in Western exports only when they were exchanged for Byzantine jewelry and metals. The defeat of the Western Turks seemed to them an unfortunate fact, but the Ctesiphon Treaty in 591 stabilized the Silk Road two years later, bringing the Chinese a victory almost tantamount to consolidating Eastern Roman hegemony in the Mediterranean. It should be noted that exclusively international trade relations helped the Sui dynasty eliminate the great famine that broke out in 594 and the large-scale peasant uprising of the southern provinces that followed it.

By the way, while Yang-Soh-tegin was leading his army into the trap of Bahram Chubin, it was in 589 that Wen-Di destroyed the South Chinese ruler Hou Zhu of the Chen dynasty, extending the borders of the empire to the limits of modern Vietnam. Wenyu-Di managed to oppose the reconciliation between Kara-Churin and Yong-Ulug in 588-590, though with difficulty. In the

eastern Turkic direction, the ambassador of the Sui dynasty Zhang-sun-sheng found a pro-Chinese pretender to the post of Kagan – Zhangar from the ruling Ashin family (Gumilev, 1961). The war of 589 to some extent distracted the Western Turks from internal issues of the Turkic Khaganate, but after the terrible defeat of his son, Kara-Churin-Turk went on rapprochement with the Eastern kinsmen. In 593, the Turks were reconciled. From that moment, Wen-Di began to play the card of the traitor Zhangar. The civil war in the steppe broke out with new force. Yun-Ulug died at the hands of Chinese spies in the last months of 599 (Gumilev, 1961). Kara-Churin-Turk proclaimed himself the Khagan (599-603), but the Chinese invasion turned this powerful political figure of the second half of the VI century into the last Kagan of the united Turkic Khaganate (Gumilev, 1961). Fleeing from the Chinese, Kara-Churin died, like most of his relatives from the Ashin family. Zhangar considered himself the Kagan of the Eastern Turks, but the Khagan of the Western Turks turned out to be Il-tegin-Buyuruk - the very Ktesiphon prisoner who survived the coups of 590-591 and was released to Sogdiana by Shahinshah Khosrov II Parviz.

After the Ctesiphon Peace of Byzantium and Persia (591) and the Altai Truce of the Turkic Khaganate (593), the world political situation began to move slowly towards the conflagration of a great war that engulfed most of the VII century. Heather correctly called the Ctesiphon Peace a “Versailles moment” since the loss that resulted from the initial victory seemed to be a terrible humiliation for Sassanid Iran. In the Far East, West Asia and the Mediterranean, various forces were preparing for revenge against the successes of the Eastern Roman Empire and Sui China. In the end, these forces began a great widespread war in 602-604, which Gumilev called “the World War of the VII century” (Gumilev, 1961).

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