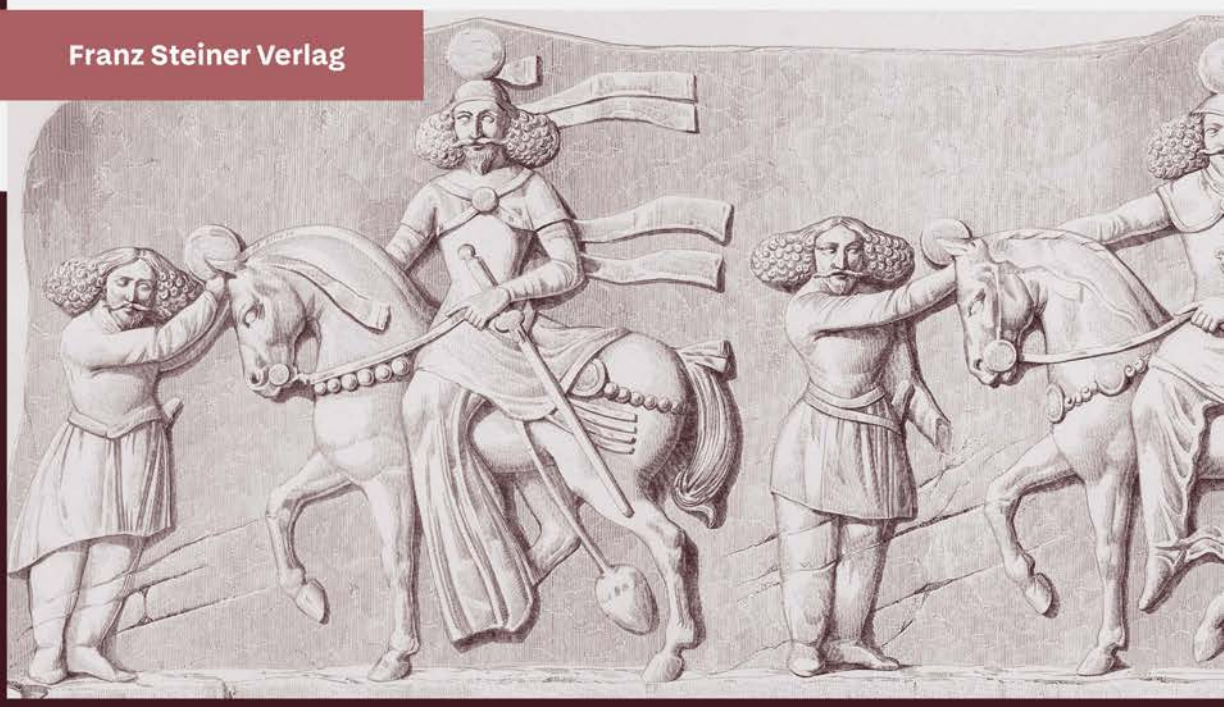
Ruling the World

Mechanisms of Direct and Indirect Rule in the Sāsānian Commonwealth

Edited by
Frank Schleicher, Udo Hartmann and Timo Stickler

ORIENS ET OCCIDENS
Studien zu antiken Kulturkontakten und ihrem Nachleben | 49

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Oriens et Occidens

Studien zu antiken Kulturkontakten und ihrem Nachleben

Herausgegeben von
JOSEF WIESEHÖFER

in Zusammenarbeit mit
PIERRE BRIANT, GEOFFREY GREATREX und ROBERT ROLLINGER

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Rendering of an early Sasanian rock relief from Salmas by Charles Texier.
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Content

Foreword 7

MAREK JAN OLBRYCHT
The Fall of Arsacid Parthia and the Grand Strategy of Ardašīr I until AD 224 ... 13

HANSJOACHIM ANDRES
Ammianus Marcellinus, Johannes Zonaras und die Diplomatie des Jahres 357/58
Einmal mehr zum „Achämenidenerbe“ 35

FRANK SCHLEICHER
Die Adiabene in der zweiten Hälfte des 4. Jahrhunderts
Zwischen direkter und indirekter Herrschaft 55

TOURAJ DARYAEE
Divided Loyalties
The Evolution of the Sasanian Army 81

GIORGI UGULAVA
Die fortwährende Bedrohung Iberiens durch die Perser aus der Perspektive der lokalen Überlieferung 91

NICOLAS J. PREUD'HOMME
Sasanians in Western Caucasia
History of an Imperial Aporia (3^{rd}–7^{th} cent. CE) 111

LARA FABIAN
The First Christian Kings and their Kin
Dynastic Marriage in the South Caucasus 141

JAKOB RIEMENSCHNEIDER
Indirect Rule in Contested Spaces
Managing Imperial Allies and Clients from a Greek Perspective 161

ANDREAS KLINGENBERG
Die sāsānidische Religionspolitik als Herrschaftsinstrument
und Konfliktfaktor 177

DESMOND DURKIN-MEISTERERNST
Chapter XV of *The Armenian History* Attributed to Sebeos 197

HAIDAR LASHKRY
Shifting Boundaries of Inclusion
The Kurdish Identity and Imperial Power from the Sasanian to Islamic Eras 209

ALIREZA SHAHMOHAMMADPOUR
Architectural Evidence of Religious Control over Land in Sasanian Society 225

LANA CHOLOGAURI
Sasanian Silver Vessels from Georgia 239

Index 267

Abbreviations 273

Foreword

This volume brings together the contributions to the conference 'Expressions of Empires: Indirect Rule in the Sāsānian Commonwealth,' which was held in Jena from 7 to 9 September, 2023. This conference formed a pivotal element of the Jena research project 'Vassal Rule in the Sāsānian Commonwealth.', which was funded by the German Research Foundation. The conference aimed to examine the methods of imperial rule in the Sāsānian Empire from multiple perspectives. The contributions presented herein demonstrate the multi-layered nature of these methods. All of the elements may encompass a variety of social, economic, architectural and religious components. In the Sāsānian Empire, however, a distinctive form of governance emerged, characterised by indirect dependent rule, known as vassalage.

The personal allegiance of vassal rulers to an imperial centre constituted an efficient method of exercising power. From the 3rd to the 5th century AD, vassals fulfilled several pivotal roles within the empire, including border security, tax collection and administration, with a high degree of autonomy. It was not until the reforms of the 5th and 6th centuries by Kavād I and Ḫosrau I in the later phase of Sāsānian rule that the economic and military conditions were created to establish direct rule across the board. This development is marked by the replacement of many traditional vassal rulers with imperial officials. However, the rulers of the empire miscalculated the capacity of their governance, which proved incapable of assuming the responsibilities of its vassals on a permanent basis. The empire began to disintegrate, thus contributing to the downfall of Sāsānian rule.

The project 'Vassal Rule in the Sāsānian Commonwealth' examines the Sāsānids methods in dealing with the vassal rulers, who were partly inherited from their predecessors, the Arsacids, and to what extent the structures of the Sāsānian Commonwealth were influenced by those of their predecessors. The study examines the reasons for the Sāsānid abandonment of the vassalage system as well as its replacement with costly direct rule in many areas (Armenia, Arabia) from the 5th century onwards. Furthermore, an examination of the political framework conditions and the degree of autonomy afforded to the vassal rulers is conducted.

Consequently, the concept of vassalage can be regarded as a pivotal component of the Sāsānian 'social structure.' The institution itself was a key factor in the imperial centres' administrative, cultural, and religious influence over the peripheral regions.

The study focuses on key regions of the Commonwealth, for which a substantial body of research is available and which have been at the centre of numerous studies in recent years. In this manner, the fundamental structures and functions of Sasanian vassalage are exemplified and described.

The research project aims at developing a model that can effectively articulate the structures of indirect rule exercised by the Sāsānid rulers in their broader context. In addition to the analysis of the differences and similarities between different regions, particular attention will be paid to the approaches adopted by individual Sasanian rulers. The model thus conceived will serve as a basis for further research into vassal rule and invites comparison with other ancient empires (Rome, Arsacids).

The papers presented at the Jena conference amount to a significant contribution to these research goals, as they provide a broad and multi-faceted perspective from numerous scholars well versed in the topic. Consequently, the research project is thoroughly informed by contemporary research ideas and theories even as it is being developed.

The contents of this volume have been organised in such a way as to explore historical issues pertaining to the centre of the Commonwealth first. The arrangement of these issues in chronological order has been attempted where feasible. **Marek Jan Olbrycht** opens his analysis with a discussion of the collapse of the Arsacid Parthian Empire and the strategic measures implemented by Ardašīr I, the founder of the Sāsānid dynasty. The author places particular emphasis on the weakening of Arsacid rule due to internal dynastic conflicts, and the importance of the great Parthian noble families (especially the Sūrēn and Kārin). Ardašīr I was successful in establishing an alliance between Persis, Carmania, Adiabene, Bēṯ Garmāi and other regions. The 'grand strategy' he devised focused on the control of key economic and trade centres, with a particular emphasis on the southern regions of Iran and the Persian Gulf. Olbrycht emphasises that Ardašīr's seizure of power did not constitute a radical break with the past, but rather a transformation of the Parthian order, with many political structures remaining intact. The Sāsānids regarded themselves as the legitimate successors within a supra-regional Iranian power structure.

In the second contribution, **Hansjoachim Andres** considers the so-called 'Achämenidenerbe' as reported by the Romans in the context of Sāsānian-Roman diplomacy in 357/358 CE. The central question posed by the author, whether the Sāsānid rulers invoked the Achaemenids to justify their territorial claims against the Romans, is specified by a distinction between mere knowledge of the Achaemenids and a historical conception in the sense of Mediterranean historiography – a concept which he argues hardly existed in Sāsānian Iran. An analysis of two divergent sources – Ammianus Marcellinus, who mentions the Achaemenid heritage, and John Zonaras, who does not – suggests that references to the Achaemenids were more likely to be Roman propaganda. Ammianus's account may be based on semi-official Roman sources portraying the enemy as arrogant and irrational. Thus, the Achaemenid heritage emerges

as a Roman construct designed to legitimise their own positions in diplomatic conflicts.

Frank Schleicher's study illustrates the complexity of Sāsānian rule in the border region. Focusing particularly on Ardašīr II, who became King of Kings of the Sasanian Empire in 379, it examines the power structure of Adiabene in the second half of the 4th century. Schleicher demonstrates that, although Ardašīr II was entrusted with the kingship of Adiabene in 344 and 376, it was actually Sāsānian officials such as Tamšāpūr who administered the area, particularly the military. Ardašīr II mainly resided outside his realm, presumably at the court of his brother Šāpūr II, exercising his authority only indirectly. His limited presence in contemporary sources, such as the writings of Ammianus Marcellinus, can be explained likewise. However, the *Syrian Martyr Acts* do attest to his authority over the region. The analysis makes the argument for the Adiabene kingship under Ardašīr existing only in name, while the region had already been fully integrated into the central administrative structures of the empire.

In his contribution, **Touraj Daryaee** examines the development of the Sāsānian army from the early 3rd to the 7th century. Starting from the reforms undertaken by Ardašīr I, who established a formidable military force that played a pivotal role in the expansion of the empire, the army's efficiency was particularly evident under Šāpūr I, marked by conquests in the Persian Gulf and the Roman-Persian border region. New siege techniques and the use of heavy cavalry transformed warfare. In the 5th century, threats from the Iranian Huns resulted in the adoption of the stirrup and far-reaching reforms under Kavād I and his son Ḫosrau I, including the division of the empire into four military districts. Recruiting nomads, such as the Dailamites and Kurds, altered the army's ethnic composition and reduced its long-term loyalty to Sāsānian central power. As the noble families lost power and regional commanders rose to prominence, the military system became more decentralised, a trend that continued in part under Muslim rule after the Arab conquest.

These contributions are followed by an examination of Sāsānian rule in the more peripheral regions of the empire. **Giorgi Ugulava**'s analysis considers the ongoing threat to the ancient kingdom of Iberia (modern-day eastern Georgia) from Persia, as seen through the lens of Georgian tradition. Located at the intersection of Roman and Iranian interests, Iberia adopted a flexible stance between the two great powers. Despite its close cultural, political, and economic ties with Sāsānian Iran, Georgian historiography typically depicts the Persians in a negative light. Ugulava attributes this attitude to three main factors: aggressive Sāsānian expansion in the 3rd century; the political weakening of the Iberian monarchy in favour of the nobility, who were said to be more pro-Persian; and Christianisation, which signalled a shift towards Rome. Although Persian religious policy, especially under the Sāsānids, was not systematically hostile to Christianity, it was stylised as such in later sources. The source situation is problematic, marked by later retrospectives and coloured by political intentions. Ugulava particularly advocates a differentiated, pan-Caucasian view.

Nicolas Preud'homme examines the limited effectiveness of Sāsānian rule in the western Caucasus from the 3rd to the 7th century AD. Although diplomatic relations with Lazica and neighbouring regions had been established as early as the 3rd century, the Sāsānids never succeeded in gaining permanent control of the region. Archaeological finds and literary sources provide evidence of Persian attempts to exert influence, such as through the exchange of symbolic gifts or the establishment of short-lived vassal states. During the Lazic War (541–562), the Sāsānids encountered shifting loyalties among the local elite. Furthermore, geostrategic difficulties, religious differences (especially the rise of Christianity), weak economic integration, and the pragmatic policies of the peoples of the Caucasus prevented a lasting Persian presence. Thus, Sāsānian rule hardly extended beyond structurally limited imperial access to a geopolitically important yet difficult-to-control region.

In her paper, **Lara Fabian** examines marriage and kinship policies in the South Caucasus during the 3rd–4th centuries AD – a period of profound political and religious upheaval. Dynastic marriages served not only to secure power, but to legitimise local rule and integrate local rulers into the networks of Rome, the Sāsānids and the steppe peoples as well. The study uses the examples of the first Christian kings, Mirian III of Kʿartʿli, Tiridates the Great of Armenia, and Uŕnayr of Albania, to show the strategic use of marriages with local, Iranian, Roman, or North Caucasian partners. While Mirian is depicted as 'Iranian' and linked to the Sāsānids, Armenian sources highlight Tiridates' connection to Rome. Such representations reflect cultural patterns of interpretation rather than historical facts. Controversial practices such as polygyny and endogamous marriages can likewise be observed amid the tension between Iranian tradition and Christian norms. Overall, it is evident that dynastic marriages were a pivotal means of attaining political stability and navigating cultural identities in the early Christian Caucasus.

Jakob Riemenschneider's contribution analyses the portrayal of indirect rule in the Late-antique Orient by three classical Greek historians: Procopius of Caesarea, Agathias of Myrina, and Theophylact Simocatta. The focus is on the political dependencies between Rome, Persia, and their respective vassal states, particularly in the Caucasus region. Riemenschneider demonstrates how authors of this genre of history adopt and perpetuate established narratives concerning 'natural' loyalties, cultural identity and tradition. Constants that emerge from this analysis include mistrust of imperial representatives, sudden changes of loyalty in the event of a breach of contract or aggression, and the importance of religious or cultural continuity. Riemenschneider argues that many motifs, such as a people's connection to their ancestral land, are more literary tropes than real historical observations. The analysis thus exposes a double dependency: firstly, that of the vassal states on the empires; and secondly, that of historiography on its own traditions.

The third part of the volume brings together papers addressing various aspects of religion, language and identity. In his contribution, **Andreas Klingenberg** examines

Sāsānian religious policy as both an instrument of rule and a source of conflict, from the reign of Ardašīr I to that of Ḫosrau II. The close intertwining of religion and kingship becomes apparent, as does the fact that the kings of kings often derived their legitimacy from Zoroastrianism. Ardašīr used religious symbolism and measures, such as establishing royal fires, to consolidate his power. Under his successors, such as Šāpūr I and the influential priest Kartīr, Zoroastrianism became more institutionalised, often at the expense of religious minorities, including Jews, Christians, and Manichaeans. The intensity of religious repression fluctuated depending on the political situation; for instance, during periods of tension in foreign policy with Rome or during internal power struggles. Despite repeated persecution, Christians and Jews remained significant population groups, some enjoying stable conditions and official recognition. Overall, Sāsānian religious policy served political rather than theological purposes, and was closely linked to the stabilisation of royal authority, particularly in the Commonwealth's peripheral regions.

Desmond Durkin-Meisterernst analyses chapter 15 of the Armenian Chronicle of Pseudo Sebeos. He focuses on the role of the Armenian aristocracy amid the tensions between Byzantium and the Sāsānian Empire. The text discusses Emperor Maurikios's and King Ḫosrau II's plans to remove the Armenian princes from their homeland and deploy them in border regions to combat external threats. While the Byzantine part of Armenia is affected by forced resettlement, Ḫosrau honours the nobles. Sebeos demonstrates his familiarity with Persian affairs, providing a comparatively impartial account. This work provides rare insights into the Late-antique world order from an Armenian perspective, reflecting the structural differences in how rulership was exercised by the great powers.

Haydar Lashkry examines the development of Kurdish identity in the context of the Sāsānian and early Islamic periods. Sāsānid rulers classified nomadic groups, such as the Kurds, rather flexibly depending on their political needs, sometimes integrating them and at other times marginalising them. This strategic categorisation continued under Islamic rule and served to exercise imperial control. The term 'Kurds' referred less to an ethnic group than to social types: specifically, non-sedentary pastoral communities. Early Islamic authors such as al-Ṭabarī and al-Dīnawarī adopted Sāsānian narratives and reinterpreted them within an Islamic framework. This article demonstrates to what extent cultural prejudices and political interests shaped perceptions of the Kurds, which have been passed down through the ages.

The volume concludes with two contributions that examine Sāsānian rule from a material perspective. **Alireza Shahmohammadpour** analyses control and management of land in the Sasanian Empire based on the so-called *Čahār-Ṭāq* structures, that are primarily understood as fire temples of central religious significance. Not only were these buildings sacred, they also played an economic and administrative role, insofar as they were often built in isolated locations in fertile areas or near resources such as mines. Architecturally, they differ significantly from mosques, which explains their

comparatively rare conversion after the Islamic conquest. Notably, many later Imamzadeh shrines are located close to these fire temples, suggesting potential functional continuity. Both types of building appear to have been associated with religious land ownership and endowments (*waqf*). The architecture enables us to draw conclusions about power relations, social hierarchies, and sacred land use in Late-antique Iran.

Lana Chologauri examines Late-antique silver vessels from Georgia that are directly or indirectly connected to the Sāsānian Empire. These artefacts, which include the renowned Sargveši cup featuring portraits of Bahrām II and the Armaziskhevi bowl bearing a Middle Persian inscription, primarily date from the late 3rd century. They reflect the diplomatic relations between Iberia and Iran during this period. Another focus is on locally produced objects such as the Magraneti and Khovle bowls and the Aragvispiri jugs, which combine Roman forms with Iranian iconography. The unique 6th/7th-century Chermiskhevi bowl marked by Christian symbols attests to renewed Persian influence. Overall, the vessels demonstrate Iberia's role as an interface between Rome and Persia, documenting political alliances and cultural exchange, as well as the persistence of Iranian artistic traditions in the Caucasus.

Insofar as every author has different preferences concerning the spelling of Iranian and local names and terms, complete standardisation within the text has not been an aim of the editors, while the prosopographical and geographical terms listed in the index have been adapted in most cases (including within quotations) if they appear in several articles. The index lists Iranian terms – as far as possible – according to the convention of the *Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft* or the spelling preferred in the *Encyclopædia Iranica*. If Georgian terms appear in Stephen Rapp's transcription, which is widely used today, this transcription was given preference in the index. For the remaining terms, an attempt was made to follow the 'majority.' If a modern term exists (e. g. Abkhazia), this was used. Terms that belong to the main topic of individual articles (Achaemenids, Iberia) were not specifically marked in these articles.

We would like to thank the German Research Foundation and the Ernst Abbe Foundation for their generous funding of the conference and publication, as well as Hansjoachim Andres and Raffael Schmidt for their assistance in proofreading the texts.

Jena in December 2025

The Fall of Arsacid Parthia and the Grand Strategy of Ardašīr I until AD 224

MAREK JAN OLBRYCHT

The Heritage of the Western Arsacids

The subject of this study is the collapse of the Arsacid Empire, or more precisely, the transformation of this empire into a new form under the Sāsānian dynasty, which was largely a continuation of the old political order. Although sources are sparse, it is possible to identify some major factors contributing to the downfall of Arsacid Parthia.[1] The main events that led to the fall of Parthia are known, but it is difficult to answer why, and in whose interest, the western Arsacid dynasty was overthrown and how this happened. It is necessary to look at the role of the centuries-long rule of the Arsacid dynasty in Iran and at that of its branches, as well as the major Parthian clans that formed the elite in the Arsacid Empire. The crucial figure of Ardašīr I and his grand strategy is also important to this study, as are the political stages of his career and his programmatic goals.[2] The origins and course of the Sasanian rebellion in Persis are not entirely clear. Relevant information is provided by written accounts[3] and numismatic data.[4]

1 Email: olbrycht@mail.ch. I acknowledge the support of the Humboldt Foundation, the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, USA, and the Lanckoronski Foundation. Thanks are due to Frank Schleicher for inviting me to the Jena conference. All dates in the text are after Christ, unless otherwise indicated.

2 There are few studies devoted exclusively to the fall of Arsacid Parthia, see Никоноров 1984; Shayegan 2022. See also Debevoise 1938, 240–269 ("downfall" of Parthia as from 117 AD); Wolski 1993, 195–199; Wiesehöfer 2008. For the Rise of Ardašīr I: Taqizadeh 1943; Widengren 1971; Wiesehöfer 1986; 2008; Dodgeon/Lieu 2002, 9–33, 275–299 (Appendix I); Daryaee 2010; Olbrycht 2016 a. Continuity between Arsacid Parthia and the Sasanian Empire: Никоноров 2005; Pourshariati 2008; Shayegan 2022.

3 Main sources: ŠKZ (Huyse 1999); *Chronicle of Arbela* (Kawerau 1985); Armenian sources (cf. Thomson 1976; 2006; Traina 2018); Ṭabarī's History (Bosworth 1999); the anonymous *Nihāyat al-Irab*, cited and tr. in Widengren 1971, 767–772. Other Oriental sources are provided and discussed in Widengren 1971.

4 Alram 2003; 2007; 2008; Shavarebi 2017 a; 2017 b.

The Later Arsacid Empire ca. 110–226

The rivalry and conflicts among various branches of the Arsacid dynasty was a major factor in the fall of the Western Arsacids. This phenomenon tends to be overlooked and rarely discussed in historical studies. In the early part of the 1st century, the Gondopharid (Indo-Parthian) dynasty, which can be called the Eastern Arsacids, standing in close relation to the powerful Parthian Sūrēn clan, was established in Sistan (Sakastan) and Arachosia.[5] Sāsān, the father of Ardašīr I, was of Indo-Parthian origin. Ardašīr I, based in Persis, intended to subvert the old order and overthrow the Arsacid dynasty, which ruled over Iran proper and Mesopotamia and can be called the Western Arsacids. The House of the Western Arsacids achieved considerable power under Vologases I and Pakoros II (ca. 51–110), but later it often split into warring branches.[6] A branch of the Arsacid House ruled in Armenia beginning with Tiridates I (ca. 52–80?).[7] Apart from the Arsacids, the ruling elite in the Arsacid Empire consisted of great Parthian families, including especially the Sūrēn and Kārin clans.

The Parthian Empire went through periods of triumph and of crisis. It experienced a political and military heyday under Vologases I and Pakoros II, ca. 51–110. During this period, the empire was rebuilt and strengthened, and the then established structures largely survived into the early Sāsānian period.[8] The position of the King of Kings in Parthia was dominant, but lateral Arsacid branches of rulers in Media Atropatene, Armenia, probably in Karmania, and vassals in Adiabene, Mesene (Charakene), Persis, and Elymais played an important role.[9] This imperial system worked well when there was a unified central power represented by the King of Kings, who exercised effective control over both the Arsacid royal domain and the dependent kingdoms and regions. After the death of Pakoros II around 110, the *Imperium Parthicum* was divided into two parts ruled by rival Arsacid kings, a chronic disease that plagued Later Parthia. The civil war in Parthia between Vologases II, son of Pakoros, and Osroes I, brother of Pakoros, was exploited by the Roman Emperor Traian in an attack on Armenia and Parthia. Toward the Arsacid King of Kings, the regions and smaller kingdoms within the Empire became increasingly powerful.[10]

In western Parthia, the pivotal minor kingdom was Adiabene, a strategic stronghold guarding access to Babylonia and Iran from the north and northwest. Hatra remained an unbroken stronghold of the Arsacids in the 2nd and early 3rd centuries. A huge trading hub was the kingdom of Mesene on the Persian Gulf, where the links of trade and

5 Bivar 2002; 2007; Fröhlich 2004; 2008; Olbrycht 2016 a.
6 Olbrycht 1998 b; 2016 b.
7 Schottky 2019.
8 On Parthia from Artabanos II to Pakoros II, see Olbrycht 1998 a, 138–203; 1998 b; 2013 a; 2022 b.
9 For Parthia's kingship and imperial rule, see Olbrycht 2022 a; 2022 b. Cf. Gregoratti 2017.
10 See Olbrycht 1998 b; 2022 b. On Later Parthia ca. 110–226, see: Olbrycht 1998 b; Dąbrowa 1984; Hartmann 2009; 2019.

Arsacid policies became apparent. Elymais, in conjunction with Susiana, was an important kingdom. Armenia, ruled by an Arsacid lateral line, was mostly under Roman domination in the second half of the 2nd century. At the time of Caracalla, Armenia fended off a Roman invasion and retained ties with the Western Arsacids.[11] A key vassal state was Karmania. The founder of the "Younger" Arsacid line, Artabanos II, had close kinship relations with both Hyrkania and Karmania. Karmania, connected by routes to Parthia proper, Sistan/Sakastan, Persis, and Media, was a country with enormous economic and political potential. Its importance became apparent in Oceanic trade and with regards to its key role on the trade route via south Iran between Indo-Parthia and Mesene.[12]

In Parthia, political processes and major political trends were largely determined by economic developments. These, in turn, were based on production volume, natural resources, and trade, as well as the network of roads. Thus, when discussing the history of Later Parthia, it is essential to take into account the economic links and major roads in Iran and neighboring countries. In a latitudinal array, two major highways traversed Parthian Iran. There was the Northern Road, or the Arsacid Royal Road, which ran from Upper Mesopotamia and Babylonia to Khorasan and Margiana. It is the subject of descriptions by Isidore of Charax (*Stathmoi*) and Ptolemy (*Geogr*. 1.11–12). The other artery was the less discussed Southern Road, which led from Babylonia and Mesene via Susiana-Elymais, Persis and Karmania to Sistan/Sakastan and Makran. Both of these great routes are described in the *Tabula Peutingeriana*, segments XI–XII (which contains material of the Later Parthian period). Interestingly, the Southern Road is regularly mentioned in the major Chinese accounts (*Shiji*, *Hanshu*, *Houhanshu*) as an artery connecting the rich land of Wuyishanli (later called Paichi), identified as Indo-Skythia (Indo-Parthia), with Tiaozhi, i. e. Mesene/Charakene on the Persian Gulf.[13]

The Arsacids built their power mainly along the Northern Road, having their royal domain there from the Euphrates to Margiana, Sistan and Arachosia. The countries of the southern belt of the Arsacid Empire included Mesene, Susiana-Elymais, Persis, and Karmania. The division of Parthia into two great belts, the southern and northern, is expressed in Pliny the Elder's work describing the 18 kingdoms of the Parthians (*regna Parthorum*).[14] Beginning in the latter part of the 1st century under Vologases I and Pakoros II, the Arsacids attempted to gain more control over key lands in the southern belt of the Parthian Empire. Among these was Mesene, where an Arsacid prince temporarily ruled in the 2nd century.[15] Susa and Elymais appear to have been ruled by a

11 Adiabene: Marciak 2017. Hatra: Hauser 2000. Mesene: Schuol 2000; Gregoratti 2011; Hauser 2022. Armenia: Chaumont 1976; Schottky 2019. Elymais: Hansman 1998; Dąbrowa 2015.

12 Karmania/Kirman: Potts 1989; Olbrycht 2013 a, 62–63, 154–160; 2024.

13 On the roads and routes in Parthia, see Hartmann 2018; Olbrycht 2024. On the Southern Road in light of Chinese data, see Hill 2015, vol. 1, 21–23; Olbrycht 2024, 188.

14 Plin. *NH* 6.112. This information is partly echoed in Amm. Marc. 23.6.14.

15 Olbrycht 1998 b, 142–143.

loyal line of dependent rulers in the later Arsacid period.[16] Persis remained an Arsacid vassal, but its princes attempted to throw off Arsacid rule in the late 2nd century.

Vologases IV and Persis

The Arsacid King of Kings Vologases IV (191/2–207/208) issued his coins over the course of 19 years.[17] His tetradrachms are rare and of poor quality, which undoubtedly indicates a crisis in the royal economy. Vologases IV is best known for anti-Roman military activities during the Roman-Parthian Wars of 195–199. As described in the *Chronicle of Arbela*, Vologases IV faced a major rebellion by "the Persians and the Medes". It most likely took place in the 190s, although its exact date remains debated.[18] The *Chronicle of Arbela* states that the war between the Parthians and the Persians erupted "after long preparations". Alongside the Persians, the Medes appeared as allies, and the hostilities took place in Khorasan (i. e., in Parthia proper). They ended with the victory of Vologases IV. Significantly, after the triumph, Vologases IV invaded Adiabene and its King Narsai was killed in retaliation for refusing to join the Arsacid King of Kings. It can be assumed that the Adiabenian king had links with Persis and the Medes and took a wait-and-see attitude. In all likelihood, Adiabene had some ties to the Gondopharids.[19] The term "Medes" most likely refers to local satraps and magnates in Media, probably members of the Kārin and Mihrān families. The revolt of the Persians demonstrates three components of a coalition seeking a coup in the Arsacid Empire: Persis, parts of Media, and Adiabene. As a matter of fact, this is almost the same coalition that brought Ardašīr I to power three decades later. This alone is an indication that despite the defeat of the rebels, the opposition to Vologases IV and his successors had not been crushed, and the problem of vassal disloyalty had not been definitively solved. The end of the reign of Vologases IV seems to have been a phase of growing political conflicts. Around 205–206 there was likely another revolt in Persis,[20] which implies an escalation of the crisis in the Arsacid Empire.

16 Hansman 1998; Dąbrowa 2015.

17 From 503 SE (191/2 AD) to 519 SE (207/8 AD) (Sellwood 1980, type 87).

18 Kawerau 1985 a, 22–23 (text); 1985 b, 41–42 (translation). Cf. Ortiz de Urbina 1936; Wiesehöfer 2008; 2009; Hartmann 2009.

19 This was evident much earlier, when the Indo-Parthian Kinnamos intended to overthrow Artabanos II, but the rebellion ended with a bizarre compromise. See Olbrycht 2013 a, 167–168.

20 Details in Wiesehöfer 2008, 535. He assumes that Pābag was appointed King of Khir in 205/6, and Ardašīr began his open revolt in 211/12 (cf. Ṭabarī I 813). This chronology, however, is not entirely convincing.

Vologases V versus Artabanos IV

Power in Parthia was assumed around 207/8 by Vologases V, son of Vologases IV.[21] Around 213, his brother Artabanos rebelled, and a war broke out between the brothers.[22] Vologases V remained ruler in Babylonia. His coins, of debased silver, are known until 221/222; there is an isolated issue dated to 227/228, but its chronological position is uncertain.[23] Perhaps this later group consists of forgeries. Artabanos IV controlled Iran and Upper Mesopotamia. He did not mint tetradrachms, only drachms and bronzes ascribed to his Ekbatana mint.[24] The coin evidence suggests that around 222 Vologases died and Ktesiphon passed into the hands of Artabanos. When Ardašīr I captured Ktesiphon in 226, Artabanos' son Aršak was killed there, but there is no longer any mention of Vologases V. Coin deterioration proves that the resources of the royal Arsacid treasury were limited. The economic system and trade were thus suffering from a crisis. Trade could not function well when conflicts sliced routes and hampered economic activity. Nonetheless, in 217, seven years before the Battle of Hormozgān, Artabanos dealt a major defeat to the Romans at the Battle of Nisibis.[25] This implies that Parthia was still an empire with huge military potential, but the new scenario had already been announced, a rebellion in Persis was developing, and there was a coalition preparing a decisive coup.

The Supporters and Enemies of Artabanos IV

What were the pillars of Arsacid power in the face of Ardašīr I's rebellion? In Iran, the strongholds of the old Western Arsacid regime were Media Atropatene, Karmania, Susiana-Elymais (called the Kingdom of Ahwāz in Islamic sources), and Paraitakene (Isfahan, Sasanian Spahān).[26] In Mesopotamia, among the bastions of Artabanos IV were Babylonia with Ktesiphon, Mesene/Charakene, and Hatra. The Babylonian Jews favored Artabanos, but it is not known whether they took part in the fighting.[27] Also fighting on the side of Artabanos's faction was a coalition of rulers from Central Iraq led by Šādmihr. In addition, on the side of Artabanos's sons stood Armenia.

One of the decisive factors in the defeat of Artabanos was the disloyalty and vacillating attitude of the satraps and magnates in the Parthian heartland, both in Parthia proper (which may be equated with Khorasan) and in Greater Media with its metropo-

21 Debevoise 1938, 262–263.
22 Cass. Dio 77.12.2 a; Karras-Klapproth 1988, 36–37 and 208; Wolski 1993, 191–192.
23 Sellwood 1980, type 88. Controversial issue: 88.17 (539 SEM = AD 227/228).
24 Sellwood 1980, types 89 and 90.
25 Debevoise 1938, 266–267.
26 Spahān: Gyselen 2019, 199–200.
27 Neusner 1966, 27–28; Herman 2012, 28–29.

lises in Ekbatana (Hamadan) and Rhaga (Ray). Artabanos IV was in control of large parts of Media (including Nihavand in southern Media), but the attitude of the satraps even in the main centers of Media, especially in Hamadan and possibly Ray, was shaky. Parthia proper's position is puzzling – the forces of this country did not take part in Artabanos' battle at Hormozgān. The same applies to Marw in Margiana.

Ardašīr I began his rise to power in Khir (Ḫīr) and Dārābgird, centers located in eastern Persis, and he had to conquer hostile principalities including the vicinity of Dārābgird, the main metropolis of Persis at Istakhr (Iṣṭaxr), and the coastal realm of Haftwād on the Persian Gulf. Ardašīr I's rebellion was unequivocally supported by the economically strong Beth Garmai/Garmēgān (Kirkuk region) and Adiabene, as well as Parthian magnates from the Sūrēn and Kārin families of Media, Khorasan, and eastern fringes of Parthia.[28] Members of these clans are listed as key dignitaries in the courts of Ardašīr I and Šāpūr I. The Kārin family had large estates in Media. Sūrēn, on the other hand, was dominant in the eastern borderlands, in Sistan, parts of Khorasan, and perhaps Margiana.[29] In all likelihood, a major ally of Ardašīr I was Indo-Parthia ruled by an Eastern Arsacid line, closely linked to the Sūrēn clan, with its center in Sistan. Initially, however, Sistan did not engage militarily in an open way. Ardašīr I's alleged father, Sasan, descended from this Indo-Parthian house.[30] The rebellion of Ardašīr I was directed against the Western Arsacids. This is highlighted by Ṭabarī:

> Hence Ardašīr massacred the Arsacids en bloc, women and menfolk alike, not sparing a single one of them, in accordance with the intention of his forefather Sāsān.[31]

Ardašīr I sought to destroy the Western Arsacids not only in the line of Artabanos, but also in lateral lineages, such as the ruling houses in Armenia or Atropatene, and also to eliminate local dynasties closely related to the Western Arsacids, such as those in Hatra, Mesene/Charakene, Susiana-Elymais, and Kirman/Karmania.

28 On the great Parthian clans, see Ṭabarī I 683 (Bosworth 1999, 77): "Bishtasb lived in Dihistan of Jurjan and was a contemporary of Falhawi who dwelled at Mah Nihawand, of Surin Falhawi who dwelled in Sijistan, and of Isfandiyar Falhawi who dwelled at al-Rayy." Kārin: Olbrycht 1998 a, 162, 173; 2013a, 30, 32, 190. Sūrēn: Olbrycht 1998 a, 115–116, 219; 2013 a, 20–32, 118–119, 129–131, 138–157, 166–167, 177–178, 223–228, 234–237.

29 Pourshariati 2008, 42, is right in her statement that "Parthian dynasts, who were the co-partners in rule for the Arsacid dynasty, came to form a confederacy with the Sasanians as well."

30 Olbrycht 2016 a.

31 Ṭabarī I 823 (Bosworth 1999, 24).

The Grand Strategy of Ardašīr I by 224

The Conquest of Fars and Karmania

Analyzing the successive conquests and deeds of Ardašīr I, it is possible to reconstruct his political plan, which can be characterized by the modern term "grand strategy". Pābag, the alleged foster father of Ardašīr I, ruled a small principality in the area of Khir, south of Lake Bakhtegan,[32] which is located about 160 km east of Shiraz and 15 km west of the town of Neyriz.[33] Lake Bakhtegan is fed by the Kor River, which originates in the Zagros Mountains near Mount Dena. The Kor, the ancient Araxes, runs through the heart of the province of Persis/Fars near Istakhr and Persepolis. Both Khir and Dārābgird were located at the extremity of the basin of the Kor River, which constituted the main axis of Persis/Fars. Khir was a strategic location on the route from central Persis and Istakhr to Karmania. The location of Khir impacted the policy goals of Ardašīr I. On the one hand, the basin of the strategic Kor River had to be subdued, along with the city of Istakhr. On the other hand, Ardašīr I saw the necessity of subduing nearby Karmania as a region loyal to the Western Arsacids, which threatened his original homeland.

Ardašīr I's rebellion is linked in a complex way to that of Pābag, considered in some accounts to be his father. Pābag's role is not clear but he is said to have obtained permission from Gōzihr, the King of Istakhr, who was subject to the Arsacid King of Kings, to send his son Ardašīr in the service of Tīrī, the commandant of the stronghold of Dārābgird. When Tīrī died, Ardašīr I took over the city of Dārābgird and subjugated several districts nearby, including Jubanana, and killed their princes.[34] It is puzzling that Ardašīr I accomplished the usurpation in Dārābgird and in the course of the rebellion called on Pābag to rebel against Gōzihr in Istakhr.[35] Indeed, Pābag and his son Šāpūr rebelled, killing Gōzihr and conquering Istakhr. Šāpūr followed his father as King of Istakhr but then died in an accident, perhaps in an assassination attempt by Ardašīr I.[36] This narrative in Ṭabarī suggests that there were two centers of rebellion in Persis and that Ardašīr I eliminated his alleged brother Šāpūr from the rivalry. The Arsacid King of Kings Artabanos (Ardawān) refused to acknowledge Pābag's and Šāpūr's usurpations. The chronology of events is still not firmly established. Ardašīr I himself initiated his own era with his overthrow of the Parthians in 223/224.[37] Scholars assume

32 Ṭabarī I 814. Cf. Daryaee 2010, 246.
33 The city was known for its armorers, which has been connected to the historical evidence of iron mining in the region. See Le Strange 1905, 278, 289–290, 302, 320.
34 Ṭabarī I 815. The ruins of the ancient city of Dārābgird are located 7 km southwest of modern-day Dārāb.
35 Ṭabarī I 815–816.
36 Ṭabarī I 816.
37 Ṭabarī I 818–19; *Chronicle of Arbela* 1985, 29–30 (transl. 49–50). See Wiesehöfer 2008, 536.

that the subjugation of Istakhr by Pābag took place around 205–206 because that year is implied as the beginning of an era in a Sāsānian (Middle Persian/Parthian) inscription at Bīšāpūr which is dated to "the year 58, forty years of the [royal] fire of Ardašīr I, twenty-four years of the fire of Šābūr".[38]

After seizing parts of Persis with Istakhr, Ardašīr I invaded Karmania and conquered the country. Along the way, he is said to have quelled the conspiracy of his brothers and put down a rebellion in Dārābgird:

> He got wind of a plot on the part of his brothers and some other persons in his entourage to assassinate him, hence he slew a great number of them. Then news came to him that the people of Darabjird [Dārābgird] had risen against him, so he returned thither and conquered the town after killing a number of its citizens. He proceeded to Karmania, where there was a king called Balash.[39]

Ṭabarī states that there ensued a fierce battle, in which Ardašīr I took part personally until he captured the King of Karmania, Balash, and seized control of the capital. Ardašīr I thereupon appointed as governor over Karmania one of his sons, also called Ardašīr.[40] The name Balash (Vologases in Roman sources, Parthian Bālāš/Wālāš) is typical of several Later Parthian rulers; the name along with the political context imply that Karmania, which remained under the rule of the Western Arsacids, was governed either by their lateral line or by a loyal dynasty affiliated with the Arsacids. The annexation of Karmania significantly strengthened Ardašīr I, as he created a strong dominion from Istakhr to Kirman, controlling an important part of the southern Iranian lands and routes leading from Sistan to Persis and Mesene.

As is known from the chronicle of Ṭabarī and other accounts, Ardašīr I became famous as the founder of a series of cities, one of which, Vēh-Ardašīr, was established in northern Karmania as a bulwark against a possible invasion by Artabanos' forces on the route from Media or Khorasan to the south. It was probably the first urban foundation of Ardašīr I. This city is not mentioned by Ṭabarī, whose account focuses on Persis itself and the western parts of the Empire of Ardašīr. The existence of the city of Vēh-Ardašīr in Karmania is attested to by Ḥamza Isfahānī.[41] It was built on the site of Valāsjird in Karmania (also written as Valāšgird and Lāškird) and may be identified with the present city of Gulāškird or Faryab.[42] Arguably Ardašīr I undertook the refoundation of the city established likely by the Arsacid King Vologases I.

38 Wiesehöfer 2008, 534–535.
39 Ṭabarī I 816–817 (Bosworth 1999, 9).
40 Ṭabarī I 817.
41 Le Strange 1905, 300–303; Metzler 1982, 188–190.
42 Valāsjird: Chaumont 1974, 87–89; Le Strange 1905, 317–318. The city was located a three-day march southwest of Jiruft at the junction of the roads from Jiruft to Hormoz and to central Fars.

At this stage, information about Sistan's involvement is not available in the sources. However, with the conquest of Karmania, Ardašīr I established a direct link to Sistan as his potential ally. Sistan, controlled by the Sūrēn clan and the Gondopharids, feared the revenge of the still strong Artabanos and took a passive stance, as did Adiabene and Garmēgān.

Coastal Persis, Susiana-Elymais, Mesene and Ardašīr's Southern Belt

The next stages of Ardašīr I's conquests were the regions located on the Persian Gulf including the coast of Persis, the Kingdom of Ahwāz (Susiana-Elymais), and Mesene. Ṭabarī relates the story of Haftwād/Haftanbokht, the ruler of a coastal land on the Persian Gulf.[43] This account is incorporated into the royal Sāsānian legend known from *Kār-nāmag* and from *Shāhnāma*.[44] Legendary elements aside, Ardašīr conquered a mighty kingdom in coastal Persis and eliminated its ruler. Afterwards, Ardašīr killed the local prince Mihrak and conquered his district[45] in which he founded the city of Ardašīr Khorra (Ardašīr-Ḵorra = Gōr).[46] Nearby Ardašīr I erected a palace and a fortress and had the famous rock relief carved after his victory at Hormozgān. Ardašīr Khorra/Gōr became the chief residence of Ardašīr I. Its location was extremely advantageous in many ways, being situated far south of the axis of the Kor/Araxes River and Istakhr, which was vulnerable to expected attacks by Parthians from Susiana-Elymais or Paraitakene.

While engaged in consolidating his realm, Ardašīr I received a letter from Artabanos IV rebuking him for his rebellion and conquests.[47] The 'King of Ahwāz' (i. e. Xūzistān, whereby the term refers both to Susiana and to Elymais) was sent by Artabanos to subjugate Ardašīr I, but this force was defeated by Abarsam, Ardašīr I's chancellor, and in retaliation the southern part of the Ahwāz country was occupied by Ardašīr I's forces. Thus, Ardašīr I conquered the borderland between Persis and Susiana-Elymais in the region of Rāmhormoz, and reached the borders of Mesene, a powerful and wealthy kingdom on the Persian Gulf. In a further step, Mesene was subjugated, which proved one of the greatest victories of Ardašīr I so far (ca. 222). The last king of Mesene was Abinergaos III, called Binega in Ṭabarī.[48]

43 Ṭabarī I 817.
44 Cf. Widengren 1971, 763; Shahbazi 2002.
45 Ṭabarī I 817. Widengren 1971, 737, 777–778.
46 Ṭabarī I 817. Widengren 1971, 737. Gōr was renamed Firuzabad by the 10th-century Buyid ruler 'Adud al-Dawla.
47 On the exchange of letters between Ardašīr and Artabanos IV, and the conquests of Ahwāz and Mesene, see Ṭabarī I 817–818. Cf. Wiesehöfer 1986.
48 Schuol 2000, 368. Cf. Justi 1895, 62, 68.

After conquering Mesene, Ardašīr I ended the first stage of his rebellion, forming a powerful bloc of countries including Karmania, Persis, southern parts of Susiana-Elymais, and Mesene. No one before him had managed to establish such a powerful rebel coalition against the Western Arsacids. His revolt was not a desperate fight against an overwhelming enemy. By 224, Ardašīr I had a good shot at victory throughout the entire Empire. Not only did he have powerful resources and strategic ports and routes under his control, but he also enjoyed strong allies in the northern Arsacid belt (Adiabene, Garmēgān), and arguably in Sistan. Also on his side were the great families of Sūrēn and Kārin, which controlled estates and districts in Media and Khorasan.

The conquest of the eastern and northern coasts of the Persian Gulf, and the subjugation of Mesene were intertwined with the scenario of full control of the Persian Gulf.[49] This plan, including the conquest of the Arab side of the Gulf, was to be continued after the capture of Ktesiphon by Ardašīr I in 226.

With Mesene in his hands, around 222, Ardašīr I already controlled the port centers that served the large-scale trade by merchants from Palmyra, Hatra, Adiabene, Media, Arab realms, and other countries. Mesene held a pivotal strategic and economic importance as the presumed largest center of trade in the Arsacid Empire, linked to other kingdoms and provinces within the vast Parthian state. Of only slightly less importance was the economic weight of Karmania with its harbors, to which routes led from Parthia, eastern Media, and Sistan. Persis obviously had great economic and military potential. Now parts of Susiana-Elymais were in the hands of Ardašīr I as well. The rulers and satraps of the northern zone of the Arsacid Empire saw a new emerging force that had taken over the pivotal economic and trading hubs in the south. If one adds to this the attitude of the powerful clans of Sūrēn and Kārin, who sought a coup in Iran so as to have a much greater share in power and the economic system, the strategic position of Artabanos IV appears quite weak. The rulers of Garmēgān and Adiabene, representing strong elements in the economic system of Parthia, appeared as allies of Ardašīr I. Apparently, they perceived the victory of Ardašīr I as inevitable.

City Foundations of Ardašīr I

Ardašīr I, following in the footsteps of Vologases I and some other Arsacids, pursued a plan of building a network of cities and fortresses at key points of the royal domain and

49 That topic was elaborated by Whitehouse/Williamson 1973 and Piacentini 1985. See also Whitehouse 1996 and Daryaee 2003.

beyond.[50] Ṭabarī credits Ardašīr I with founding several cities. Further foundations are mentioned by Ḥamza and other authors.[51]

Three new centers were located in Persis. Ardašīr I's first residence, Ardašīr-Ḵorra (= Gōr), was located far to the south of Istakhr, protected by the Qaleh Zahak stronghold. The second foundation in Persis was Rēv-Ardašīr (= Rīšahr) near Bushehr on the Persian Gulf.[52] It took place after the defeat of the coastal ruler Haftwād and served as a port and bastion on the coast of the greater Persis region. The other foundation, Rām-Ardašīr, may be identified with Rāmhormoz. It was a city on the border of Persis and the kingdom of Ahwāz.

Another group comprises cities founded outside the borders of Persis. Hormozd-Ardašīr (= Sūq al-Ahwāz) in Xūzistān assumed the importance and functions of Susa, which was associated with the reign of the Western Arsacids. There was no way to miss the new foundation for the conquered kingdom of Mesene, and the city of Astarābād-Ardašīr (= Karḵ-e Meyšān) was established. After the capture of Ktesiphon in 226, Vēh-Ardašīr was established opposite Ktesiphon. To secure the Persian Gulf from the west, on the Arabian side, a foundation was located there (perhaps in Bahrain?), Fasā(Psʾ?)-Ardašīr (after 226). Finally, the northern fringes of Adiabene enjoyed the establishment of Nūḏ-Ardašīr near Mosul. This city controlled the routes to Hatra, Nisibis, and Armenia, and thus the main military destinations of Ardašīr I in the northern borderland with the Roman provinces.

The city of Vēh-Ardašīr in Karmania, mentioned by Ḥamza, should be added to this list. It appears that Ardašīr I re-founded the city of Hormoz on the coast of Karmania, one of pivotal harbors and centers of international trade.[53] All of these foundations make profound strategic sense in creating a network that consolidated the new empire. Actually, Ardašīr I built cities on the sites of old settlements, or merely changed the names of some centers. The plan was apparently to create a network of cities, similar to the one established by Vologases I (and by some other Arsacids), and to locate the foundations at key strategic points. They were to solidify the empire.

The Kingdom of Isfahan and the Battle of Hormozgān

In the next stage, after conquering the southern Iranian belt and Mesene, Ardašīr I planned to strike at the heart of Artabanos IV's domain: the northern Arsacid belt including Media and Khorasan. Ardašīr first captured the kingdom of Isfahan (Spahān),

50 Foundations of Ardašīr I: Metzler 1982, 177–189; Badiyi 2020; Askari Chaverdi/Callieri 2022.

51 Ṭabarī I 820. Details in Whitehouse/Williamson 1973, 31–32; Metzler 1982, 184–190. Ḥamza lists 11 cities, see *Annalium libri X*, pp. 46–49 (text) and pp. 33–34 (translation).

52 Potts 2018.

53 Metzler 1982, 189.

forcing its king (in *Nihāyat* given as Shahrpanāh) to flee and opening the way to the Nihavand region on the route between Ekbatana and Susa. The Kingdom of Isfahan likely encompassed parts of Paraitakene, which was located in a region from Isfahan to Apolloniatis (between the Zagros Mountains and the Tigris River).[54]

Only at that point did Artabanos move with an army to defend his Empire, after many of his vassals and satraps had adopted a wait-and-see attitude. Artabanos underestimated the rebellion of Ardašīr I, and idly looked on until he lost all of southern Iran and Mesene. The action of his loyal vassal, the King of Ahwāz, against Ardašīr I proved ineffective. It was clear to many Parthian magnates and satraps that Ardašīr I was on the road to victory and a complete change in Iran was looming on the political horizon.

The *Chronicle of Arbela* holds significant information about the alliance between the rebellious Ardašīr and the rulers of Adiabene and Kirkuk (Bēṯ Garmāi/Garmēgān):

> These Parthians, however, because of the many wars and battles were weakened, and when the Persians and the Medes observed this they concluded a covenant with Šahrat, the King of Adiabene, and Domitianos, the king of Karkā ḏ-Bēṯ Selōḵ [Bēṯ Garmāi], and started in the spring a powerful fight against the Parthians. The Parthians were conquered and their dominion crushed forever.[55]

It is therefore clear that Ardašīr I, when launching the great offensive against Artabanos, already had the support of Adiabene, Bēṯ Garmāi, and the Medes. The accounts of *Nihāyat* and *Ta'rīh-i Qumm* imply that the decisive battle between the armies of Ardašīr I and Artabanos took place immediately after the conquest of Isfahan.[56] Roman accounts speak of three battles in which Ardašīr I defeated the Parthians.[57]

Ardašīr I in Media, Marw and the East

In the Battle of Hormozgān, fought somewhere between Isfahan and Nihavand, Ardašīr I's army defeated Arsacid forces and killed Artabanos IV. By compiling various accounts, including *Kārnāmag*, one can infer that Ardašīr I had forces from Persis/Fars, Kirman, and Makran at his disposal.[58] Meanwhile, Artabanos managed to gather only contingents from parts of Media. No source speaks of other units in the army of the

54 Contrary to other narratives, Ṭabarī states that the King of Isfahan was killed. See Widengren 1971, 740. Paraitakene bordered on Apolloniatis (Strab. 15.3.16). Herzfeld 1968, 186 identifies Paraitakene as the Bakhtiari country between Isfahan and Xūzistān.

55 After Widengren 1971, 778 (with modifications).

56 Widengren 1971, 743.

57 Cass. Dio 80.3.1–2; Zonaras 12.15 p. 572, 7–17.

58 KN IV: "< From> Kirmān and Mukrastan and Fārs from all regions he assembled an army in great numbers and came to the war with Ardavān" (after Widengren 1971, 776).

King of Kings. *Kārnāmag* states that Artabanos relied on troops from Ray, Dumbavand (Danbāwand/Demavand), Dailamān and Pātašxvārgar.[59] The *Nihāyat* claims that Artabanos gathered troops from two parts of Media (al-Māhān), which may be identified as the districts of Nihavand and Dinavar, and from Mihragānkadak and Māsabadad.[60] The latter two regions are hard to locate. The information about the two Medias may have meant Greater Media and Atropatene. After the victory over Artabanos, according to *Ta'rīh-i Qumm*, Ardašīr I fought the battle with two satraps of Hamadan and Ray, who met him at Dūdahak near the Qummrūd.[61] The account raises the suspicion of whether it was a real battle or an encounter which ended in a diplomatic compromise. In general, Ardašīr I confirmed the chief satraps within Media (called 'kings' in the *Nihāyat*) in the major cities of Hamadan, Qumm, Ray and Dashtaba (part of Media close to Dailam).[62] Artabanos had little support in Media, and many officials were acting passively and sluggishly. The great inscription of Šāpūr (ŠKZ) mentions during the reign of Ardašīr I members of the two Parthian houses Sūrēn and Kārin, and in the reign of Šāpūr a member of the family Mihrān from Ray as well, as holding high-ranking positions at the court of the Sasanians.[63] This ostentatious shift to the side of Ardašīr implies that Kārin, and presumably also the Mihrān clan, based chiefly in Media, had betrayed Artabanos.

Following the battle, Ardašīr I captured the treasury and harem of Artabanos[64] and dwelt a month in Nihavand. Here he received the submission of Ahwāz.[65] The victory of Ardašīr I shattered the Arsacid center of power. No leader emerged, no strong successor to Artabanos. Only unspecified sons of Artabanos appear in Western accounts: Dio speaks of children of Artabanos that contributed to the victory over Ardašīr I in Armenia and Media Atropatene.[66] Local kingdoms joined the fray. The bastion of the western Arsacids remained parts of Media Atropatene, Hatra and Babylonia. In Ktesiphon resided the minor son of Artabanos Aršak.

After the annexation of Media, Ardašīr I marched further east, through Khorasan proper and on to Marw. His actions after the victory of Hormozgān are not the subject of this article, but it is essential to highlight the major events summarily. Ṭabarī and some other accounts are very aggregate and convey a false chronology of events.

59 KN IV, text and translation in Widengren 1971, 775. For Sasanian Ray, see Gyselen 2019, 177–180; Danbāwand: Gyselen 61–62; Dēlān/Daylām/Daylamān: Gyselen 2019, 66, 86. Pātašxvārgar refers to Parišwārgar, i. e. Mazanderan, see Gyselen 2019, 172–173.

60 Discussion in Widengren 1971, 41–42. See Pourshariati 2008, 36, n. 146. For the districts of Nihavand and Dinavar, see Gyselen 2019, 141–142.

61 Widengren 1971, 744–745.

62 Widengren 1971, 745.

63 Widengren 1971, 742. Cf. Gyselen 2019, 179–180 (Sasanian Ray).

64 Widengren 1971, 744–5.

65 Confirmed in the *Nihāyat* and Dīnawarī, see Widengren 1971, 745 and 769.

66 Cass. Dio 80.3.3.

Ṭabarī records that after the victory over Artabanos, Ardašīr marched westward and occupied Ktesiphon and the Mosul region, and only then went via Fars to Sistan and Abārshahr (Khorasan). The chronology given by the *Nihāyat* is more reliable. It should be recognized that Ardašīr had to first consolidate his power in Greater Media, Khorasan, Marw and Sistan. Only with a secured and well-organized base, and after gaining new armed forces from more vassals and allies, did Ardašīr I go to war against pro-Artabanid forces in Atropatene, Hatra, Babylonia and a coalition of princes in central Iraq.

The *Nihāyat* does not name the conquered countries in northwestern Iran, but it aptly shows the mechanism of annexation, mainly through submission:

> Then he [Ardašīr] marched from the city of Nihāwand, reports having met him from all these countries, the kings of which had offered him submission, together with their kings, until he penetrated into the country of Xorasān. He didn't come to any land without its king coming to him, offering his submission, to him and paying landtax, haradǧ. He dwelt in the city of Marw for one year, until all the kings of Xorāsān had brought him their submission.[67]

The general term 'Khorasan' is used for many countries east of Ray as it refers to kings in the plural. It likely embraces Parthia proper, Marw, and Sistan.

Major important sources mention Khorasan proper (often named Nišāpūr) and Sistan as countries conquered by Ardašīr I in the east. Dīnawarī's account shows that the principal acquisition was Sistan, and Ardašīr I moved on to Karmania and Istakhr.[68] Dīnawarī stresses the pattern of submission which was the recognition of Ardašīr's power by minor rulers:

> Ardašīr marched on to Ray, then to Xorāsān without arriving at any territory where its king did not submit to him with a vassal's obedience.[69]

Ibn al-Aṯīr and Ṭabarī added Balḫ, Chorasmia, and Gorgan to Ardašīr I's conquests. According to the *Nihāyat*, Ardašīr I stayed mainly in Marw for one year and forced the recognition of his power in Sistan, Balḫ, Khorasan (Nišāpūr), and Chorasmia.[70] Based in Marw, Ardašīr could have sent troops to attack Kushan Bactria and, along the Oxos River, Chorasmia. There may have even been recognition of his dominance by Chorasmia, and negotiations with the Kushans which Sāsānian accounts interpreted as a surrender of the Kushan kingdom. Only Ṭabarī mentions battles and enemy heads

67 Widengren 1971, 770.
68 Widengren 1971, 772.
69 Widengren 1971, 772.
70 Widengren 1971, 767.