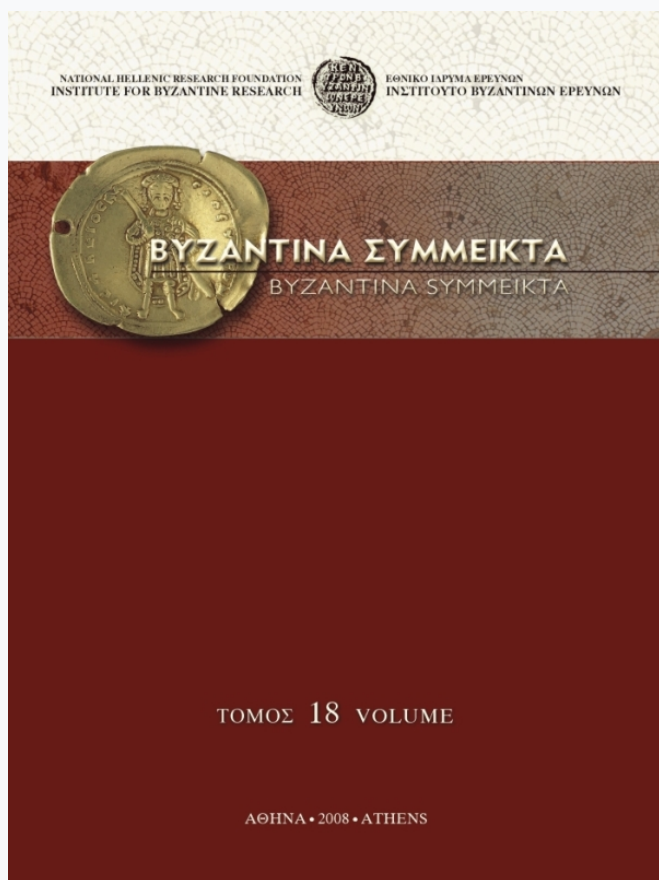


## Byzantina Symmeikta

Vol 18 (2008)

BYZANTINA SYMMEIKTA 18



### The trip of the Great Persian Embassies to Byzantium during the reign of Justinian I (527-565) and its logistics

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doi: [10.12681/byzsym.273](https://doi.org/10.12681/byzsym.273)

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#### To cite this article:

DIMITROUKAS, I. (2009). The trip of the Great Persian Embassies to Byzantium during the reign of Justinian I (527-565) and its logistics. *Byzantina Symmeikta*, 18, 171–184. <https://doi.org/10.12681/byzsym.273>

THE TRIP OF THE GREAT PERSIAN EMBASSIES TO BYZANTIUM  
DURING THE REIGN OF JUSTINIAN I (527-565) AND ITS LOGISTICS

According to a long-standing custom, the diplomatic communication between Persia and Byzantium in the sixth century was carried out mainly by the *great envoys* (μεγάλοι πρέσβεις). The *small* or *lesser envoys* (ἥσσονες πρέσβεις), who were sent to give thanks for the receipt of the great envoys, played only a secondary and complementary role<sup>1</sup>. The reception of the Persian great envoys at the frontier (ἐν τοῖς μεθορίοις)<sup>2</sup>, their safe conduct<sup>3</sup> to the Byzantine capital

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1. Cf. *The History of Menander the Guardsman. Introductory Essay, Text, Translation, and Historiographical Notes* by R. C. BLOCKLEY (hereafter Menander, ed. BLOCKLEY), Fr. 18. 6, 164-165: ἔκπαλαι τὸ τοιόνδε νομισθὲν ὡς ἀμφοτέρως πολιτείας, ὥστε μετὰ τοὺς μεγάλους πρέσβεις στέλλεσθαι ἑτέρους ἥσσονας τῆς τῶν μεγίστων πρέσβεων ἀποδοχῆς τε ἕκατι καὶ φιλοφροσύνης.

2. The Byzantine-Persian frontier was distant 28 stades or 3.5 Roman miles (5.25 km) from the Byzantine military stronghold Daras, built by Anastasios I in 505-507, and 98 stades or 12 Roman miles (18 km) from the Persian city of Nisibis; cf. E. HONIGMANN, *Die Ostgrenze des Byzantinischen Reiches von 363 bis 1071* [Corpus Bruxellense Historiae Byzantinae, III], Bruxelles 1935, 10; B. RUBIN, *Das Zeitalter Justinians*, v. I, Berlin 1960, 281; M. M. MANGO, "Dara", *ODB* (Oxford 1991), 588; A. DEMANDT, *Die Spätantike. Römische Geschichte von Diokletian bis Justinian (284-565)* [Handbuch der Altertumswissenschaft, 3. Abteilung, 6. Teil], München 1989, 192; K. KARAPLİ, Δάρας, μια πόλη-φρούριο στην Άνω Μεσοποταμία (6ος-11ος αιώνες), in: *Κλητόριον εις μνήμην Νίκου Οικονομίδη*, Athens-Thessalonike 2005, 137-160.

3. The official term for this conduct was διασώζειν, i. e. *conducere*, *salvum et incolumem aliquem aliquo perducere*, according to Constantini Porphyrogeniti, *De cerimoniis aulae byzantinae*, v. II (commentary), ed. J. J. REISKE (Bonn 1830), 393; therefore the companions of the foreign envoys were named *diasōstai* in Byzantium during the tenth century;

and their official reception in Chalcedon and Constantinople were subject to very strict rules; the *master of offices* (*magister officiorum*), the highest dignitary of the empire and head of the imperial post (*cursus publicus*), with his staff of officials, was responsible for the application of these rules<sup>4</sup>.

Our main source of information on these rules are the chapters 89-90 of the Book One of *De cerimoniis*<sup>5</sup>, a work of compilation produced for Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus (913-959). The chapters 84-95 are excerpted from the lost manual *On the Political State of Affairs*<sup>6</sup> by the great Roman diplomat and master of offices Peter the Patrician (ca. 500-565) and incorporated in *De cerimoniis*. Both chapters, although presented as a prescriptive text, are in fact the description of an actual event stripped of specifics, i. e. the Peter's official account of one of the three diplomatic missions to Byzantium, that were undertaken by the Persian great envoy Iesdekos<sup>7</sup> or Isdigusnas (Procopius) or Jesdegusnaph Zikh (Menander Protector) between 547 and 557<sup>8</sup>; the embassy in question is in all probability to be identified with the second mission of Zikh (551)<sup>9</sup>; his third mission

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Liutprandus, *Relatio de legatione Constantinopolitana*, c. LVII, in: Liutprands von Cremona Werke, *Quellen zur Geschichte der sächsischen Kaiserzeit. Freiherr vom Stein-Gedächtnis-ausgabe. Ausgewählte Quellen zur deutschen Geschichte des Mittelalters*, v. 8, germ. transl. by A. BAUER – R. RAU, Darmstadt 1977, 576: διασώστη, *id est meo ductori*; cf. I. DIMITROUKAS, Παράτηρήσεις σχετικά με το ταξίδι της επιστροφής του Λιουπτράνδου, *Σύμμεικτα* 11 (1997) (hereafter DIMITROUKAS, Παράτηρήσεις), 64, n. 4.

4. Fr. E. WOSNIAK, "Diplomacy, Byzantine", *DMA*, v. 4 (New York 1984) (hereafter WOSNIAK, "Diplomacy"), 195.

5. Constantini Porphyrogeniti, *De cerimoniis aulae byzantinae*, Book I, c. 89, ed. J. J. REISKE, v. I (Bonn 1829) (hereafter Const. Porph. *De cer.*, ed. Reiske), 398ff.

6. P. ANTONOPOULOS, Πέτρος Πατρίκιος. Ο βυζαντινός διπλωμάτης, αξιωματούχος και συγγραφέας [Historical Monographs, 8], Athens 1990 (hereafter, ANTONOPOULOS, Πέτρος Πατρίκιος), 196-221.

7. Cf. Const. Porph. *De cer.* I. 89, ed. Reiske, 405, 11-14: *κτενεύει (ὡς ἐν ὑποθέσει) ὁ μάγιστρος οὕτως "κληθήτω Ἰέσδεκος ὁ πρέσβης Χοσρόου τοῦ βασιλέως Περσῶν καὶ οἱ σὺν αὐτῷ ἐλθόντες", καὶ ἐπάγει ἀρμάτους.*

8. Menander, ed. BLOCKLEY, Fr. 6. 1, 54, 254.

9. Procopius (hereafter: Procop.), *De bellis*, VIII, 11, 4-10, ed. J. HAURY – G. WIRTH, Procopii Caesariensis opera omnia (hereafter: ed. HAURY – WIRTH), vol. II (Leipzig 1963), p. 535-536; cf. E. STEIN, *Histoire du Bas Empire*, v. II: *De la disparition de l' empire d' Occident à la mort de Justinien (476-565)*, publié par J.-R. PALANQUE, Paris-Bruxelles-Amsterdam 1949 (hereafter STEIN, *Histoire II*), 510.

(557)<sup>10</sup> is less probable, while his first one is out of question (547)<sup>11</sup>. Therefore the adaptation of the account is to be dated to between 551 or 556-7 and 565<sup>12</sup>. The scholars of Constantine VII did not revise, but copied the excerpts and added some comments, which are included in parentheses<sup>13</sup>.

The aim of this paper is, through a minute analysis of the chapter 89 and partially of the chapter 90, to investigate and to examine the logistics of the Persian embassy's trip (itinerary and duration of the trip, economics, means of transportation, lodging and feeding of the embassy) as well as to describe the administrative framework, through which the whole transit operation was supported.

When the *master of offices* received the message, that a great Persian envoy was about to travel to Byzantium, he sent a Byzantine *magistrate* (*ἄρχων*) to receive and to conduct the envoy to Constantinople. The *archon* crossed into the Persian territory and came to the region of Nisibis, where he met and greeted the Persian envoy and handed over to him a written invitation to come to Constantinople. This invitation was an official document undersigned and sealed by the *emperor* (*γράμματα βασιλέως*) or the *master of offices* or exceptionally an oral mandate (*mandatum/ἀρχικὴ κέλευσις*<sup>14</sup>) of the same authority, a kind of passport or entry permit<sup>15</sup> that

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10. Agathiae Myrinaei, *Historiarum libri quinque* [CFHB, 2. Series Berolinensis], IV, 30, 8-9, rec. R. KEYDELL, Berlin 1967 (hereafter Agathias, *Historiae*, ed. KEYDELL), 163; cf. ANTONOPOULOS, *Πέτρος Πατρίκιος*, 203-204.

11. Procop., *De bellis*, II, 28, 38-44, ed. HAURY – WIRTH, vol. I (Leipzig 1962), 288-289; cf. STEIN, *Histoire II*, 503-504.

12. Cf. M. McCORMICK, “De cerimoniis”, *ODB* (Oxford 1991), 595-597. The parenthetical phrase (*ὥς ἐν ὑποθέσει*), in: Const. Porph., *De cer.* I. 89, ed. REISKE, v. I, 405, 11, is a result of this adaptation.

13. Const. Porph., *De cer.* I. 89, ed. REISKE, v. I, 401, 18-19: Ἦτοι ὁ σακελλάριος τοῦ βασιλέως (νῦν γὰρ εἰς αὐτὸν μετηνέχθη ἡ χρεία); 402, 9-10: (δίδωσι δὲ αὐτοὺς ὁ σπαθάριος τοῦ βασιλέως).

14. Menander, ed. BLOCKLEY, 72.

15. A later term for the entry or travel permission into and in the territory of the empire was *sigillum imperiale* or *σφραγὶς βασιλική* (or *βασιλέως*); cf. I. Ch. DIMITROUKAS, *Reisen und Verkehr im Byzantinischen Reich vom Anfang des 6. bis zur Mitte des 11. Jahrhunderts* [Historical Monographs, 18], v. I, 1997 (hereafter DIMITROUKAS, *Reisen*), 108ff.; DIMITROUKAS, *Παρατηρήσεις*, 75, n. 38; I. DIMITROUKAS, *Die Rückreise des Johannes Eugenikos von dem Ferrara-Konzil und sein Schiffbruch auf der Adria im Jahre 1438, Σύμμεικτα 15* (2002) (hereafter DIMITROUKAS, *Rückreise*), 232, n. 13.

authorized the Persian envoy to enter the Byzantine territory with his men. The text of this short document is to be reconstructed as following: Ὁ μέγας πρεσβευτὴς ἐλθέτω [πρὸς ἡμᾶς] μετὰ εὐθυμίας καὶ θεραπείας, i. e. *the great envoy should come [to us] with cheerfulness and leisury*.

Then the Persian envoy, accompanied by the Byzantine *archon*, the Persian *archon* of Nisibis, his attendants and a military escort, left for the frontier; he and his attendants were received by the *archontes* of Daras at a point of the frontier, that is probably to be identified with the usual custom posts between Nisibis and Daras/Anastasiopolis, mentioned in the text of the Byzantine-Persian treaty of 562<sup>16</sup>. From a few passages of Procopius<sup>17</sup> follows, that in times of peace a permanent feature of the Persian-Byzantine frontier was its permeability, in spite of the presence of great numbers of *limitanei*, who had to defend the eastern boundaries of the Roman territory against the invasions of the Persians and the Saracens<sup>18</sup>. The historian remarks that particularly in peaceful times Romans and Persians “*were keeping no strict guard over the frontier regions*”<sup>19</sup> and that in some regions the frontiers were indistinct, because of the absence of geographical objects functioning as marks (mountains, rivers and lakes), so that communities living on both sides of the eastern frontier could have close economic and social relations with each other<sup>20</sup>. All these factors explain why illegal border crossing of persons and prohibited items, the so-called *κεκωλυμένα* (weapons, silk et cetera), was a daily reality along the empire’s eastern frontier. Therefore a fixed point on the frontier was determined by both (Byzantine and Persian) governments, where custom posts were established, in order to control persons and travel documents and to prevent illegal border crossing of persons and goods.

The escorting soldiers and the *archon* of Nisibis were obliged to remain in the Persian territory. The *archontes* of Daras had to take care and to be awake to ensure, that Persians soldiers didn’t creep in the Roman territory and take possession of Daras through a coup de main. The controlling of

16. Menander, ed. BLOCKLEY, 70.

17. Procop., *De bellis*, II, 2, 1-3, ed. HAURY – WIRTH, vol. I, 151; cf. Procop., *De aedificiis*, III, 3, 9-11, ed. HAURY – WIRTH, vol. IV (Leipzig 1964), 90.

18. Procop., *Historia arcana*, 24, 12, ed. HAURY – WIRTH, vol. III (Leipzig 1963), 140.

19. Procop., *De bellis*, II, 2, 3, ed. HAURY – WIRTH, vol. I, 151.

20. Procop., *De aedificiis*, III, 3, 9, ed. HAURY – WIRTH, vol. IV, 90.

the Persian embassy was a complicated procedure (*schēma*) that aimed at the military protection of the frontier region and particularly of the very important stronghold of Daras. The Byzantines had strong reasons to act in this manner, as Petrus Patricius in his account emphasizes. According to Procopius, during the first trip of Jesdegusnaph to Byzantium (547), Daras had been seriously threatened by a carefully planned Persian surprise attack, but finally a confidant of Belisarios named Georgios<sup>21</sup> revealed and frustrated this plan<sup>22</sup>.

In Daras *veredi* (posthorses) and ζῶα (*animals*, probably mules) were granted to the Persian envoy, according to a Byzantine-Persian pact (πάκτα) made during the office of the *praefectus praetorio per Orientem* Constantinus. Therefore the dating of this pact depends on the dating of the Constantinus' office. Three *praefecti praetorio per Orientem* named Constantinus are mentioned in the period 450-550 AD: 1. Constantinus: 7 August 471; 2. Aspar Alypius Constantinus: 15 February-1 July 502; 3. Alypius Constantinus: 1 January 505<sup>23</sup>. The office of the last magistrate is timely very close to, but it doesn't coincide with the time of the important Byzantine-Persian treaty (November 506)<sup>24</sup>. Consequently the unknown pact mentioned in our document could be identified with this treaty, only on the condition that Alypius Constantinus occupied this office a second time, immediately after the ending of the office of the next *praefectus praetorio per Orientem* Eustathius (19 April 505-20 November 506).

From the specification of Petrus Patricius, that exactly 5 *veredi* and 30 ζῶα were granted to the Persian embassy<sup>25</sup>, is to be concluded, that the embassy in question was a concrete embassy, more probably the second (551) than the third one of Jesdegusnaph (556 or 557): the 5 *veredi* correspond exactly to the members of the envoy's family (the envoy and the wife, the

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21. Procop., *De bellis*, II, 19, 22, ed. HAURY – WIRTH, vol. I, 234.

22. Procop., *De bellis*, II, 28, 31-37, ed. HAURY – WIRTH, vol. I, 287-288.

23. W. ENSSLIN, "Praefectus praetorio", *RE*, v. XXII/2 (Stuttgart 1954), col. 2501.

24. K. SYNELLI, Οι διπλωματικές σχέσεις Βυζαντίου και Περσίας έως τον ΣΤ' αιώνα [Historical Monographs 1], Athens 1986, 81-83.

25. Const. Porph., *De cer.* I. 89, ed. REISKE, 400, 8-10.

two daughters and the brother of him), according to Procopius<sup>26</sup>; probably the 30 mules was reserved for the transportation of the family baggage, the trip provisions and the gifts, that were predestined for the Roman emperor (ἵπποι: horses<sup>27</sup>, *pallia*: overcoats, *κοσμίδια*: valuable ornaments); of course a part of these burden beasts was reserved for the two high officials and the other attendants (ἐπόμενοι καὶ θεράποντες), who in the case of the first embassy amounted only to 20 men<sup>28</sup>, but in the case of the second embassy of Jesdegusnaph their numbers were very high.

An essential part of the economics of the transport consisted in the calculation of the expenses of the journey and the payment of a sum (ἐπίδομα) to the embassy as a kind of compensation. The payment was based upon an agreement (ὠρίσθησαν) between the Persians and the Byzantines that the diplomatic trip between Daras and Constantinople would require at least 103 days. This unknown agreement was included in an old treaty, the precise dating of which is impossible, because of the shortness and the vagueness of the relative expression ἐξ ἀρχῆς<sup>29</sup>, used by Petrus Patricius. The money was handed over in advance to the Persian envoy by the officials of the *dux Mesopotamiae* (δουκικοί). In Constantinople an additional sum of money was to be given to the envoy, if the journey had lasted longer than

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26. Procop., *De bellis*, VIII, 11, 4-10, ed. HAURY – WIRTH, vol. II, 535-536: [...] Ἐπήγετο δὲ τὴν τε γυναῖκα καὶ τὰς παῖδας καὶ τὸν ἀδελφόν, ἐπομένων τε καὶ θεραπευόνταν πάμπολυ πλήθος. Εἵκασεν ἄν τις ἐς παράταξιν τοὺς ἄνδρας ἰέναι. Εἶποντο δὲ αὐτῷ καὶ δύο τῶν ἐν Πέρσῃσι λογιμωτάτων, οἳ δὴ καὶ διαδήματα ἐπὶ τῶν κεφαλῶν χρυσᾷ ἐφόρουν [...].

27. Const. Porph., *De cer.* I, 89, ed. REISKE, 405, 8-9: Ἀνοίγονται δὲ αἱ τρεῖς θύραι τοῦ κονισιστωρίου, ἐὰν ἔχῃ ἵππους εἰς τὰ ξένια; ibidem, 406, 19-22: καὶ ἐξέρχεται ὁ πρεσβευτής, καὶ μετὰ τῶν ἀνθρώπων αὐτοῦ βαστάζει τὰ δῶρα, καὶ εἰσέρχεται βαστάζων αὐτὸς μὲν ἢ πάλλιν (*pallium*) ἢ κοσμίδιν ἢ ὁ,τιδήποτε, ἐάν ἐστιν τίμιον, τῶν δὲ ἄλλων ἕκαστος ἐν εἶδος βαστάζει. The Persian horses were famous in the international trade; cf. *The Travels of Marco Polo* (the complete Yule-Cordier edition, 1903-1920, in: <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/10636/10636-8.txt>), ch. 15: *In this country of Persia there is a great supply of fine horses; and people take them to India for sale, for they are horses of great price, a single one being worth as much of their money as is equal to 200 livres Tournois; some will be more, some less, according to the quality.*

28. Procop., *De bellis*, II, 28, 37-44, ed. HAURY – WIRTH, vol. I, 288-289.

29. We don't know if the expression ἐξ ἀρχῆς is to be completed through the phrase τῆς Ῥωμαίων πολιτείας or τῆς Περσῶν πολιτείας.



103 days<sup>30</sup>. All these expenses were registered, probably by the *chartularii barbarorum*, in a book<sup>31</sup>, that had been halted and preserved until the time of the text's compilation or adaptation (sixth century) in the archives of the *scrinium barbarorum*<sup>32</sup>.

The Byzantine magistrate accompanied the envoy with his attendants down to Antiochia, where an *agens in rebus* or *magistrarianus* received him. Most probably the same official undertook the guidance of the embassy through the province of Syria. The reception of the Persians by a magistrate belonging to the class of *εὐνπόληπτοι* (probably the *clarissimi*), was repeated, before the convoy entered the province of Cappadocia, probably in Tarsos, the last great city of Cilicia<sup>33</sup>, and before he entered the province of Galatia, probably in Parnassos, the last great city of Cappadocia<sup>34</sup>, as well as in the city of Nicaea.

It is clear, that from Antiochia as far as Nicaea or Chalcedon the Persian diplomats and the Byzantine official escort followed the so-called *Pilgrim's Road*, the northern branch of the main highway of Asia Minor. It branched east of Nicaea to avoid the arid steppe around the salt lake in the center of the Anatolian plateau and led to Ancyra (Galatia), an important communication centre, a "knot", and then southeast to Colonia, Tyana (Cappadocia) and the Cilician Gates (Cilicia), after which it continued to

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30. Const. Porph., *De cer.* I. 89, ed. REISKE, 400, 2-7: Οἱ δουνικοὶ δὲ κατὰ τὸ εἰωθὸς τὸ δαπάνημα τῆς ὁδοῦ μέχρι τῶν ἐνταῦθα ἡμερῶν ὅγ' ἐπιδιδόασιν. Τοσαῦται γὰρ ἐξ ἀρχῆς ὠρίσθησαν ἀρκεῖν τῷ πρεσβευτῇ ἀνιόντι καὶ τοσαῦται ἀπιόντι. Ἔστιν δὲ ὅτε βραδύνη ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ, καὶ κελεύει ὁ βασιλεὺς, καὶ προσθήκη αὐτῷ γίνεται.

31. M. CLAUSS, *Der magister officiorum in der Spätantike (4.-6. Jahrhundert). Das Amt und sein Einfluß auf die kaiserliche Politik* [Vestigia 32], München, 1980 (hereafter CLAUSS, *Magister officiorum*), 137.

32. Const. Porph., *De cer.* I. 89, ed. REISKE, 400, 7-8: Ἡ δὲ γνώσις τῶν ἐπιτεδομένων αὐτῷ σῶζεται ἐν τῷ σκρινίῳ τῶν βαρβάρων (*scrinium barbarorum*).

33. *Itinerarium Burdigalense*, in: *Itinera Hierosolymitana, saecula IIII-VIII* [CSEL 39], 578, 5-579, 3, P. GEYER, Prague – Vindobonae – Lipsiae 1898 (Reprinting: New York and London 1964) (hereafter *Itin. Burd.*, ed. GEYER), 17: 578, 5, *mutatio Pilas, milia XIII*; 579, 1, *Finis Cappadociae et Ciliciae*, 2, *mansio Masucrinae, milia XII*, 3, *civitas Tharso, milia XII*.

34. *Itin. Burd.*, 576, 2-4, ed. GEYER, 16: 2 *mutatio Andrapa, milia VIII*, 3 *finis Galatiae et Cappadociae*, 4 *mansio Parnasso, milia XIII*.



Syria and Palaestina<sup>35</sup>. This branch was favored in the Early Byzantine Period (fourth-sixth centuries). On the contrary the southern branch of the same highway, which led through Dorylaeum, Amorium, Iconium and Tyana to the Cilician Gates, was preferred in the Middle Byzantine Period and used during the First Crusade. In the time of Justinian I (527-565) special stress was laid on improvement and building of roads and bridges as well as building of hostels, bathrooms and aqueducts for the *cursus publicus*, especially along the *Pilgrim's Road*<sup>36</sup>, which apparently became more comfortable and less straining than the other branch of the same highway. The good status of the *Pilgrim's Road* and its travel facilities explain, why at least during the reign of Justinian I the Persian great embassies were obliged to use exclusively this artery for their trip to Constantinople.

The distance between Daras and Constantinople through Chalcedon or Helenopolis was to be covered by the Persian embassy in 103 days, while the normal time required for this trip would be about 50-55 days<sup>37</sup>. If the calculation of the distance is right, the daily performance of the convoy was approximately (1700 km/103 d =) 16.5 or (1560 km / 103 d =) 15.1 km/d; this performance coincides nearly with the so-called normal itinerary (*iter iustum*) of the Roman troops that amounted to 10 Roman miles (= 15 km) per day<sup>38</sup>; it was the average distance between the particular stations (*mutationes/allagai, mansiones/stathmoi-monai, civitates/poleis*)<sup>39</sup> of the main roads of the imperial post, where travelers could obtain fresh animals,

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35. D. FRENCH, *The Pilgrim's Road. Roman Roads and Milestones of Asia Minor*, Fasc. I, BAR International Series, 105, Ankara 1981, 13 ff.; Cl. FOSS, "Roads and Communication, Byzantine", *DMA*, v. 10 (New York 1989), 422-425; about the history of this important road from the fourth until the eleventh century, cf. DIMITROUKAS, *Reisen*, 374-377.

36. According to Procop., *De aedificiis*, V, ed. HAURY – WIRTH, vol. IV, 149-171, dated in the year 554-555, during the reign of Justinian I (527-565) various public works, i.e. hostels (ξενοδοχεῖα), inns (πανδοχεῖα), lodgings (καταλυτήρια) for *veredarii*, bathrooms, paved roads, bridges et cetera, were completed in the territory or in the vicinity of many great cities in Asia Minor and Syria (Helenopolis, Nicaea, Nicomedia, Syceai, Kaisareia, Mokessos, Antiochia) along the Pilgrim's Road; cf. DIMITROUKAS, *Reisen*, 122-129, 236-243, 375-378.

37. DIMITROUKAS, Παρατηρήσεις, 23.

38. I. DIMITROUKAS, Ενδείξεις για τη διάρκεια των χειρσαίων ταξιδιών και μετακινήσεων στο Βυζάντιο (6ος-11ος αι.), *Σύμμεικτα* 12 (1998), 20-21, 38, 40.

39. O. SEECK, *Cursus publicus*, *RE*, v. 4 (Stuttgart 1901), col. 1855.

spend the night, eat and bathe<sup>40</sup>. Our document emphasizes, that the Byzantine magistrates had to take care of the Persians during the trip and to supply them with food, probably because, after the supposed Justinianic post reform<sup>41</sup>, the last facility apparently did not exist at all post stations or because these stations had not more the desired density. In any case the tempo of the transit of the Persian embassies was very slow<sup>42</sup>, and this is to be explained mainly by its size and the right of its members, mentioned in the treaty of 562, to exchange trade goods without hindrance or any impost during their trip<sup>43</sup>, as well as by the rough and extreme climatic conditions, that dominated along the Pilgrim's Road and specially in the central highlands of Asia Minor<sup>44</sup>, and the need of the envoys to recover from the strains of the travel.

The last part of the transit began at Helenopolis on the coast of Bithynia. Oared ships, the so-called imperial dromons (*βασιλικοὶ δρομώνες*), and beasts of burden were there at embassy's disposal. The envoys could reach the empire's capital Constantinople or Dacibyza aboard these dromons, or travel by land from Helenopolis to Nicomedia and Dacibyza, making this long detour with beasts of burden; twice, in Helenopolis and Dacibyza<sup>45</sup>, the embassy had the possibility to change the tired animals with fresh ones and so to reach the city of Chalcedon. In the light of this information of Constantine Porphyrogenitus is difficult to accept the assertion of Procopius,

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40. A. AVRAMEA, *Land and Sea Communications, Fourth-Fifteenth Centuries*, in: A. LAIOU (ed.), *The Economic History of Byzantium: From the Seventh through the Fifteenth Century*, Washington, D.C., 2002, 58.

41. Procop., *Historia arcana*, 30, 8-9, ed. HAURY – WIRTH, vol. III, 182.

42. R. SCOTT, *Diplomacy in the 6th Century*, in: J. SHEPARD -R. FRANKLIN (ed.), *Byzantine Diplomacy*, 24th Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Proceedings, Cambridge 1990, 160: (*slow pace of diplomacy*).

43. Menander, ed. BLOCKLEY, 70-71.

44. Cf. J. KODER, *Der Lebensraum der Byzantiner: Historisch-geographischer Abriss ihres mittelalterlichen Reiches im östlichen Mittelmeerraum*. Nachdruck mit bibliographischen Nachträgen, Byzantinische Geschichtsschreiber, Ergänzungsband I, Wien 2001, 42-44; I. TELELIS, *Μετεωρολογικά φαινόμενα και κλίμα στο Βυζάντιο* [Πονήματα, Συμβολές στην έρευνα της ελληνικής και λατινικής γραμματείας, 5], Ακαδημία Αθηνών. Κέντρο Ερεύνες της ελληνικής και λατινικής γραμματείας, v. I- II, Athens 2004, 117ff., 163, 167f., 234f., 243f., 252-254, 509f., 609, 693.

45. Const. Porph., *De cer.*, I, 89, ed. REISKE, 401, 2: *ἐνδακιδίζη*, which is to be emended to *ἐν Δακιβίζη* or *ἐν Δακιβύζη*.

that Justinian I abolished the section of the imperial post from Chalkedon down to Dacibyza/Dacibiza<sup>46</sup>; for, if the information of the historian is true, the envoys, after their arrival in Nicaea, would not have the possibility to choose between two alternative ways, i. e. the terrestrial (through Prusa, Nicomedia, Dacibyza and Chalcedon) and the maritime one, but they would be obliged to use exclusively the sea way, in order to reach the capital of the Byzantine State.

In Chalcedon *metata*, i.e. special lodgings for strangers, envoys or merchants, had been carefully prepared; there the members of the embassy remained for a few days, so that they recovered from the strains of the trip. The *Master of offices* sent the *optio barbarorum*, the head of the bureau of *scrinium barbarorum*, to bring to the strangers prepared food for the days, they intended to remain in the *metata*, and gifts, to transmit his welcome-greeting, to ask the envoy about the details of his trip and generally to care for the embassy and its head.

The envoys, having crossed the Propontis or the straits of Bosphorus, were received by the men of the *master of offices* at the harbour of the City of Constantine the Great, whence they were conveyed on imperial horses (during the tenth century they were granted by the *spatharios*) to a certain house (*metaton* or *οἶκος*), probably a palace; there they stayed, until they were received by the Emperor. The spaciousness and commodities of the *metatum* were dependent on the size of the embassy and the rank of the envoys. The *metatum* was equipped with a bath-room (*βαλανεῖον*), mattresses (*στρομναί*), braziers (*arulae*<sup>47</sup>), low and light beds (*κραββάτια*), furnaces (*κλιβάνια*), tops or generally cooking utensils (*χύτραι*), normal or small tables (*τράπεζαι/τραπέζια*), small wine cups (*σκύφια*) and servants (*operae*) from the capital's taverns, who had to bring water in the palace and to perform the so-called "dirty services" (*ῥυπαρά ἐργασίαι/munera sordida*). The most of these articles and the service personnel were conceded

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46. Procop., *Historia arcana*, 30, 8-9, ed. HAURY – WIRTH, vol. III, 182. The second part of the work (c. 18-30) is dated in the year 550-551 (cf. Prokop, *Anekdotia*, griechisch-deutsch, ed. O. VEH, München 1981, 3. verbesserte Auflage, 273).

47. Cf. R. VOLK, *Gesundheitswesen und Wohltätigkeit im Spiegel der byzantinischen Klostertypika* [MBM, 28], München 1983, 74-79, notes 75-76, 100-101, notes 206-207.

and delivered by the praefectus urbi or eparch of the City, the mattresses by the *comes privatarum* and the braziers by the *fabricenses* (armourers), according to mandates (πιπτάκια) edited by the *magister officiorum*. In the *metatum* of Constantinople the trip of the Persian embassy ended.

Certainly the *metata* of Chalcedon and Constantinople were closed in the winter (it is well known, that usually embassies did not travel during this season), and therefore they possessed neither permanent personnel nor the necessary equipment; for this reason the bureau of the master of offices used the servants (*operae*) and the equipment of the private taverns of both cities. Probably their service was an obligatory one for the state post, an ἀγγαρεία<sup>48</sup>, as both state and private corvée (owed by peasants to their lord) was designated in Byzantium. Both the *operae* and the Persian servants took care of the envoys and performed functions, which at the same time are distinguishable from each other and complementary to each other, although our knowledge of the kind of services, which they had to offer to the envoys, is somewhat limited.

Generally speaking the accomplishment of this diplomatic transit was a very complicated and expensive operation, which was carried out with great accuracy and according to a strict time-plan. Following agencies and authorities were involved in this operation.

In accordance with the rank of the Persian great envoy, the agents, who received and accompanied him through Asia Minor to Constantinople, could be *illustres*, i. e. from the first *senatores*-class, or *silentiarii*, i. e. from the *spectabiles*, the second *senatores*-class (since the fifth century) or *tribuni/ἐπίσημοι*, i. e. probably from the *clarissimi*, the third *senatores*-class, or *agentes in rebus/magistriani*, i. e. officers of the *cursus publicus* (state post).

Two high officials are to be meant under the term *archontes of Daras*: the political commander (*archon*) of Daras<sup>49</sup> and the military commander of the city and the region (*dux Mesopotamiae*); with his staff of officials

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48. A. KAZHDAN, "Angareia", *ODB* (Oxford 1991), 97.

49. The *archon of Daras* is mentioned in the text of the treaty of 562; cf. Menander, ed. BLOCKLEY, 72.

(δουκῖκοι) and his soldiers (the local *limitanei*)<sup>50</sup> the latter seated at Daras<sup>51</sup> and cooperated with the former for the reception of the Persian envoys.

The *scrinium barbarorum* was since the fifth century a department of the *magisterium officiorum*, directed by the *optio barbarorum*; he was responsible for the reception and supervision of the foreign embassies in Chalcedon and Constantinople, the regulation of the expenses and the coordination of their housing and feeding<sup>52</sup>. Following officers belonged to the stuff of *optio barbarorum*: a *subadiuva* or *vicarius adiuvae*, *decuriones*, *chartularii barbarorum*, *admissionales*, *interpretes diversarum gentium*, a *silentarius*, an *ostiarius*, a *tertiocerus* and various *scholae palatinae* (*labarenses*, *armati candidati*)<sup>53</sup>. They were involved in the formalities (exchange of messages, gifts and greetings between the *master of offices* and the Persian envoy and a meeting of these two men), that took place before the official reception of the Persian great envoy in the imperial palace<sup>54</sup>.

Finally are the *comes rerum privatarum*, a financial agency, succeeded in the tenth century by the imperial *saccellarios*, the *praefectus urbi*, the commander in charge of the imperial city, and the *fabricenses*<sup>55</sup>, skilled workers in the armament factories (*fabricae*) of the capital, to be mentioned.

From the preceding presentation of the trip of the Great Persian Embassies to Byzantium are following two conclusions to be drawn: 1. The whole operation of the reception of Persian embassies and their conduct to Byzantium in the time of Justinian I would be unthinkable without the existence of a dense net of public roads and their infrastructure as well as the indefatigable activity of the agents of the imperial post (*cursus*

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50. M. M. MANGO, "Mesopotamia", *ODB* (Oxford 1991), 1348; A. KAZHDAN, "Doux", *ODB* (Oxford 1991), 659.

51. According to the law or imperial decree of 443 the *master of offices* acquired control over the *limitanei* and the frontier strongholds and the duty to supervise their condition; cf. CLAUSS, *Magister officiorum*, 54-55, 125; A. KAZHDAN, "Magister officiorum", *ODB* (Oxford 1991), 1267; L. MAKSIMOVIĆ, "Magister officiorum", *LexMa*, v. 6 (München-Zürich 1993), col. 89-90.

52. WOSNIAK, *Diplomacy*, 194-195.

53. Cf. CLAUS, "Magister officiorum", 19, 56, 64, 65.

54. WOSNIAK, *Diplomacy*, 195.

55. The *fabricenses* as well as the *comes rerum privatarum* were subordinate to the master of offices. Cf. CLAUSS, "Magister officiorum", 51ff.

*publicus*), an important institution of the Late Roman State. 2. The effective cooperation of the various state officials, i. e. the central and the provincial or local, the political and the military agencies, as it was coordinated by the powerful *magister officiorum* in this case, attests to the best organization of the administrative machine of the late Roman Empire, an organization, which was undoubtedly the source of its power and its worldwide fame.

ΤΟ ΤΑΞΙΔΙ ΤΩΝ ΜΕΓΑΛΩΝ ΠΕΡΣΙΚΩΝ ΠΡΕΣΒΕΙΩΝ ΣΤΟ  
BYZANTIO ΕΠΙ ΙΟΥΣΤΙΝΙΑΝΟΥ Α΄  
ΚΑΙ Η ΛΟΓΙΣΤΙΚΗ ΤΟΥ ΥΠΟΣΤΗΡΙΞΗ

Σκοπός του παρόντος άρθρου είναι να διερευνήσει τις συνθήκες και το λογιστικό πλαίσιο διεξαγωγής των μεγάλων περσικών πρεσβειών από την Περσία στην Κωνσταντινούπολη επί Ιουστινιανού Α΄ (527-565). Οι πληροφορίες μας στηρίζονται κυρίως σε δύο αποσπάσματα από τη συγγραφή του Πέτρου Πατρικίου «*Περί πολιτικής καταστάσεως*», τα οποία περιγράφουν τη δεύτερη, πιθανώς, εκ των τριών πρεσβειών του πέρση Ιεσδεγουσνάφ και έχουν ενσωματωθεί στην «*Ἐκθεσιν τῆς βασιλείου τάξεως*» του Κωνσταντίνου Ζ΄.

Ο πρεσβευτής με την ακολουθία του διερχόταν το μεθοριακό σταθμό μεταξύ Νισίβεως και Δάρας, εφοδιασμένος με έγγραφα υπογεγραμμένα από τον αυτοκράτορα, προτού γίνει δεκτός από τις βυζαντινές τοπικές αρχές στο συνοριακό φρούριο Δάρας. Εκεί οι Πέρσες ελάμβαναν εκ των προτέρων οδοιπορικά για ταξίδι 103 ημερών και στην Κωνσταντινούπολη ένα πρόσθετο ποσό, αν το ταξίδι είχε διαρκέσει περισσότερο. Η πρεσβεία ταξίδευε έφιππη με βραδύ ρυθμό (15 χλμ/ημέρα), συνοδευόμενη από υπαλλήλους του Δημοσίου Δρόμου. Μετά την Αντιόχεια η πρεσβεία ακολουθούσε το Δρόμο των Προσκυνητών διά μέσου της Μικράς Ασίας. Τελευταίοι σταθμοί ήταν η Νίκαια και η Ελενόπολις, από όπου η πρεσβεία διαπεραιωνόταν με δρόμους στη βασιλεύουσα ή οδηγούνταν, με ενδιάμεσους σταθμούς στη Νικομήδεια και τη Δακίβυζα, στη Χαλκηδόνα και από εκεί με πλοία στη βασιλεύουσα.

Στη Χαλκηδόνα και την Κωνσταντινούπολη είχαν ετοιμασθεί επίσημα καταλύματα, εφοδιασμένα με όλες τις απαραίτητες ανέσεις για την ευχάριστη διαμονή των υψηλών ξένων. Γενικά για τη διεκπεραίωση του εγχειρήματος αυτού συνεργάζονταν, με μεγάλη αποτελεσματικότητα, διάφοροι υπάλληλοι και διάφορες υπηρεσίες της διοικητικής μηχανής του Ρωμαϊκού Κράτους, υπό την καθοδήγηση του *magister officiorum*.