

CHAPTER VIII

Of the State of Persia after the Restoration of the Monarchy by Artaxerxes

The Barbarians of the East and North

Whenever Tacitus indulges himself in those beautiful episodes, in which he relates some domestic transaction of the Germans or of the Parthians, his principal object is to relieve the attention of the reader from a uniform scene of vice and misery. From the reign of Augustus to the time of Alexander Severus, the enemies of Rome were in her bosom: the tyrants and the soldiers. Her prosperity had a very distant and feeble interest in the revolutions that might happen beyond the Rhine and the Euphrates. But when the military order had leveled the power of the prince, the laws of the senate, and even the discipline of the camp in wild anarchy, the barbarians of the north and east, who had long hovered on the frontier, boldly attacked the provinces of a declining monarchy. Their vexatious inroads were changed into formidable eruptions, and, after a long vicissitude of mutual calamities, many tribes of the victorious invaders established themselves in the provinces of the Roman Empire. To obtain a clearer knowledge of these great events, we shall endeavor to form a previous idea of the character, forces, and designs of those nations who avenged the cause of Hannibal and Mithridates.

Revolutions of Asia

In the more early ages of the world, while the forests that covered Europe afforded a retreat to a few wandering savages, the inhabitants of Asia were already collected into populous cities, and reduced under extensive empires, the seat of the arts, of luxury, and of despotism. The Assyrians reigned over the East¹, till the scepter of Ninus and Semiramis dropped from the hands of their enervated successors. The Medes and the Babylonians divided their power, and were themselves swallowed up in the monarchy of the Persians, whose arms could not be confined within the narrow limits of Asia. Followed, as it is said, by 2 million men, Xerxes, the descendant of Cyrus, invaded Greece. Thirty thousand soldiers, under the command of Alexander, the son of Philip, who was entrusted by the Greeks with their glory and revenge, were sufficient to subdue Persia. The princes of the house of Seleucus usurped and lost the Macedonian command over the East. About the same time that, by an ignominious treaty, they resigned to the Romans the country on this side Mount Taurus, they were driven by the Parthians, an obscure horde of Scythian origin, from all the provinces of Tipper Asia. The formidable power of the Parthians, which spread from India to the frontiers of Syria, was in its turn subverted by Ardshir (Artaxerxes), the founder of a new dynasty, which, under the name of Sassanides, governed Persia till the invasion of the Arabs. This great revolution, whose fatal influence was soon experienced by the Romans, happened in the 4th year of Alexander Severus, 226 years after the Christian era.²

¹ An ancient chronologist quoted by Velleius Paterculus (1. 1. c. 6) observes that the Assyrians, the Medes, the Persians, and the Macedonians reigned over Asia 1,995 years, from the accession of Ninus to the defeat of Antiochus by the Romans. As the latter of these great events happened 289 years before Christ, the former may be placed 2,184 years before the same era. The Astronomical Observations, found at Babylon by Alexander, went 50 years higher.

² In the 538th year of the era of Seleucus. Agathias, l ii. p. 63. This great event (such is the carelessness of the Orientals) is placed by Euty chius as high as the 10th year of Commodus, and by Moses of Chorene as low as the reign of Philip. Ammianus Marcellinus has so slavishly copied (xxiii. 6) his ancient materials, which are indeed very good, that he describes the family of the Arsacides as still seated on the Persian throne in the middle of the 4th Century.

The Persian Monarchy Restored by Artaxerxes

Artaxerxes had served with great reputation in the armies of Artaban, the last king of the Parthians, and it appears that he was driven into exile and rebellion by royal ingratitude, the customary reward for superior merit. His birth was obscure, and the obscurity equally gave room to the aspersions of his enemies and the flattery of his adherents. If we credit the scandal of the former, Artaxerxes sprang from the illegitimate commerce of a tanner's wife with a common soldier.³ The latter represent him as descended from a branch of the ancient kings of Persia, though time and misfortune had gradually reduced his ancestors to the humble station of private citizens. (D'Herbelot; *Bibliothèque Orientale*; Ardshir) As the lineal heir of the monarchy, he asserted his right to the throne, and challenged the noble task of delivering the Persians from the oppression under which they groaned above five centuries since the death of Darius. The Parthians were defeated in three great battles. In the last of these their king Artaban was slain, and the spirit of the nation was forever broken.⁴ The authority of Artaxerxes was solemnly acknowledged in a great assembly held at Baich in Khorasan. Two younger branches of the royal house of Arsaces were confounded among the prostrate satraps. A third, more mindful of ancient grandeur than of present necessity, attempted to retire, with a numerous train of vassals, toward their kinsmen, the king of Armenia. But this little army of deserters was intercepted, and cut off by the vigilance of the conqueror (Moses Choremensis, 1. ii. c. 65—71), who boldly assumed the double diadem, and the title of King of Kings, which had been enjoyed by his predecessor. But these pompous titles, instead of gratifying the vanity of the Persian, served only to admonish him of his duty, and to inflame in his soul the ambition of restoring, in their full splendor, the religion and empire of Cyrus.

Reformation of the Magian Religion

During the long servitude of Persia under the Macedonian and the Parthian yoke, the nations of Europe and Asia had mutually adopted and corrupted each other's superstitions. The Arsacides, indeed, practiced the worship of the Magi; but they disgraced and polluted it with a various mixture of foreign idolatry. The memory of Zoroaster, the ancient prophet and philosopher of the Persians,⁵ was still revered in the East. But the obsolete and mysterious language in which the *Zendavesta* was composed,⁶ opened a field of dispute to seventy sects, who variously explained the fundamental doctrines of their religion, and were all indifferently derided by a crowd of infidels, who rejected the divine mission and miracles of the prophet. To suppress the idolaters, reunite the schisms, and confute the unbelievers, by the infallible decision of a general council, the pious Artaxerxes summoned the Magi from all parts of his dominions. These priests, who had so long sighed in contempt and obscurity, obeyed the welcome summons; and on the appointed day appeared, to the number of about eighty thousand. But the debates of so tumultuous an assembly could not have been directed by the authority of reason, or influenced by

³ The tanner's name was Babec; the soldier's, Sassan. From the former Artaxerxes obtained the surname of Babegan; from the latter all his descendants have been styled *Sassanides*.

⁴ Dion Cassius, I. lxxx. Herodian, 1. vi. p. 207. Abulpharagius *Dynast.* p. 80. Vol. I-II

⁵ Hyde and Prideaux, working up the Persian legends and their own conjectures into a very agreeable story, represent Zoroaster as a contemporary of Darius Hystaspes. But it is sufficient to observe that the Greek writers, who lived almost in the age of Darius, agree in placing the era of Zoroaster many hundred, or even thousand, years before their own time. The judicious criticism of Mr. Moyle perceived, and maintained against his uncle, Dr. Prideaux, the antiquity of the Persian prophet. See his work, vol. ii.

⁶ That ancient idiom was called the *Zend*. The language of the commentary, the Pehlvi, though much more modern, has ceased many ages ago to be a living tongue. This fact alone (if it is allowed as authentic) sufficiently warrants the antiquity of those writings, which M. d'Anquetil has brought into Europe, and translated into French.

the art of policy. The Persian synod was reduced, by successive operations, to 40,000, to 4,000, to 400, to 40, and at last to 7 Magi, the most respected for their learning and piety. One of these, Erdaviraph, a young but holy prelate, received from the hands of his brethren three cups of drugged wine. He drank them down and instantly fell into a long and profound sleep. As soon as he woke, he related to the king and to the believing multitude his journey to Heaven, and his intimate conferences with the Deity. Every doubt was silenced by this supernatural evidence; and the articles of the faith of Zoroaster were fixed with equal authority and precision. (Hyde de Religione veterum Pers. c. 21) A short delineation of that celebrated system will be found useful, not only to display the character of the Persian nation, but to illustrate many of their most important transactions, both in peace and war, with the Roman Empire.⁷

Persian Theology—Two Principles

The great and fundamental article of the system was the celebrated doctrine of the two principles: a bold and injudicious attempt of Eastern philosophy to reconcile the existence of moral and physical evil with the attributes of a beneficent Creator and Governor of the world. The first and original Being, in whom, or by whom, the universe exists, is denominated in the writings of Zoroaster, *Time Without Bounds*. But it must be confessed that this infinite substance seems rather a metaphysical abstraction of the mind than a real object endowed with self-consciousness, or possessed of moral perfection. From either the blind or the intelligent operation of this infinite Time, which bears but too near an affinity with the chaos of the Greeks, the two secondary but active principles of the universe were from all eternity produced. Ormusd and Ahriman each possessed of the powers of creation, but each disposed, by his invariable nature, to exercise them with different designs. The principle of good is eternally absorbed in light; the principle of evil eternally buried in darkness. The wise benevolence of Ormusd formed man capable of virtue, and abundantly provided his fair habitation with the materials of happiness. By his vigilant providence, the motion of the planets, the order of the seasons, and the temperate mixture of the elements, are preserved. But the malice of Ahriman has long since pierced Ormusd's egg; or, in other words, has violated the harmony of his works. Since that fatal eruption the most minute articles of good and evil are intimately intermingled and agitated together; the rankest poisons spring up amid the most salutary plants; deluges, earthquakes, and conflagrations, attest the conflict of Nature, and the little world of man is perpetually shaken by vice and misfortune. The rest of human kind is led away captive in the chains of their infernal enemy. The faithful Persian alone reserves his religious adoration for his friend and protector Ormusd, and fights under his banner of light, in the full confidence that he shall, in the last day, share the glory of this triumph. At that decisive period, the enlightened wisdom of goodness will render the power of Ormusd superior to the furious malice of his rival. Ahriman and his followers, disarmed and subdued, will sink into their native darkness; and virtue will maintain the eternal peace and harmony of the universe.⁸

Ceremonies and Moral Precepts

The theology of Zoroaster was darkly comprehended by foreigners, and even by the far greater

⁷ I have principally drawn this account from the Zendavesta of M. d'Anquetil, and the Sadder, subjoined to Dr. Hyde's treatise. It must, however, be confessed that the studied obscurity of a prophet, the figurative style of the East, and the deceitful medium of a French or Latin version, may have betrayed us into error and heresy, in this abridgment of Persian theology.

⁸ The modern Persees (and in some degree the Sadder) exalt Ormusd into the first and omnipotent cause, while they degrade Ahriman into an inferior but rebellious spirit. Their desire of pleasing the Mahometans may have contributed to refine their theological system.

number of his disciples. But the most careless observers were struck with the philosophic simplicity of the Persian worship. "That people," says Herodotus⁹, "rejects the use of temples, of altars, and of statues, and smiles at the folly of those nations who imagine that the gods are sprung from, or bear any affinity with, the human nature. The tops of the highest mountains are the places chosen for sacrifices. Hymns and prayers are the principal worship; the Supreme God, who fills the wide circle of Heaven, is the object to whom they are addressed." Yet, at the same time, in the true spirit of a polytheist, he accuses them of adoring Earth, Water, Fire, the Winds, and the Sun and Moon. But the Persians of every age have denied the charge, and explained the equivocal conduct which might appear to give a color to it. The elements, and more particularly Fire, Light, and the Sun, whom they called Mithra, were the objects of their religious reverence, because they considered them as the purest symbols, the noblest productions, and the most powerful agents of the Divine Power and Nature.¹⁰

Every mode of religion, to make a deep and lasting impression on the human mind, must exercise our obedience, by enjoining practices of devotion; and must acquire our esteem, by inculcating moral duties analogous, to the dictates of our own hearts. The religion of Zoroaster was abundantly provided with the former, and possessed a sufficient portion of the latter. At the age of puberty, the faithful Persian was invested with a mysterious girdle, the badge of the divine protection. From that moment all the actions of his life, even the most indifferent or the most necessary, were sanctified by their peculiar prayers, ejaculations, or homage. The omission of any of these, under any circumstances, was a grievous sin, not inferior in guilt to the violation of the moral duties. The moral duties, however, of justice, mercy, liberality, etc., were in their turn required of the disciple of Zoroaster, who wished to escape the persecution of Ahriman, and to live with Ormusd in a blissful eternity, where the degree of bliss will be exactly proportioned to the degree of virtue and piety.¹¹

Encouragement of Agriculture

But there are some remarkable instances, in which Zoroaster lays aside the prophet, assumes the legislator, and discovers a liberal concern for private and public happiness, seldom to be found among the groveling or visionary schemes of superstition. Fasting and celibacy, the common means of purchasing the Divine favor, he condemns with abhorrence, as a criminal rejection of the best gifts of Providence. The saint, in the Magian religion, is obliged to beget children, to plant useful trees, to destroy noxious animals, to convey water to the dry lands of Persia, and to work out his salvation by pursuing all the labors of agriculture. We may quote from the Zondavesta a wise and benevolent maxim, which compensates for many an absurdity. "He who sows the ground with care and diligence, acquires a greater stock of religious merit than he could gain by the repetition of ten thousand prayers."¹² In the spring of every year a festival was celebrated, destined to represent the primitive equality, and the present connection, of mankind. The stately kings of Persia, exchanging their vain pomp for more genuine greatness, freely mingled with the humblest but most useful of their subjects. On that day the farmers were admitted, without distinction, to the table of the king, and his satraps. The monarch accepted their petitions, inquired into their grievances, and conversed with them on the most equal terms. "From your labors," he was accustomed to say (and to say with truth, if not with sincerity),

⁹ Herodotus, 1. i. c. 131. But Dr. Prideaux thinks, with reason, that the use of temples was afterward permitted in the Magian religion.

¹⁰ Hyde de Relig. Pers. c. 8. Notwithstanding all their distinctions and protestations, which seem sincere enough, their tyrants, the Mahometans, have constantly stigmatized them as idolatrous worshippers of the Fire.

¹¹ See the Sadder, the smallest part of which consists of moral precepts. The ceremonies enjoined are infinite and trifling. Fifteen genuflections, prayers, etc., were required whenever the devout Persian cut his nails or made water; or as often as he put on the sacred girdle. Sadder, Art. 14, 50, 60.

¹² Zendavesta, tom. i. p. 224, and *Precis du Systeme de Zoroastre*, tom. iii.

we receive our subsistence. You derive your tranquillity from our vigilance. Since, therefore, we are mutually necessary to each other, let us live together like brothers in concord and love.” (Hyde de Religione Persarum, c. 19) Such a festival must indeed have degenerated, in a wealthy and despotic empire, into a theatrical representation; but it was at least a comedy well worthy of a royal audience, and which might sometimes imprint a salutary lesson on the mind of a young prince.

Power of the Magi

Had Zoroaster, in all his institutions, invariably supported this exalted character, his name would deserve a place with those of Numa and Confucius. His system would be justly entitled to all the applause which it has pleased some of our divines, and even some of our philosophers, to bestow on it. But in that motley composition, dictated by reason and passion, by enthusiasm and by selfish motives, some useful and sublime truths were disgraced by a mixture of the most abject and dangerous superstition. The Magi, or sacerdotal order, were extremely numerous, since, as we have already seen, 40,000 of them were convened in a general council. Their forces were multiplied by discipline. A regular hierarchy was diffused through all the provinces of Persia; and the Archimagus, who resided at Baich, was respected as the visible head of the church, and the lawful successor of Zoroaster.¹³ The property of the Magi was very considerable. Besides the less invidious possession of a large tract of the most fertile lands of Media,¹⁴ they levied a general tax on the fortunes and the industry of the Persians.¹⁵ “Though your good works,” says the interested prophet, “exceed in number the leaves of the trees, the drops of rain, the stars in the heaven, or the sands on the seashore, they will all be unprofitable to you, unless they are accepted by the *destour*, or priest. To obtain the acceptance of this guide to salvation, you must faithfully pay him tithes of all you possess, goods, lands, and money. If the priest is satisfied, your soul will escape hell tortures; you will secure praise in this world, and happiness in the next. For the priests are the teachers of religion; they know all things, and they deliver all men.” (Sadder, Art. 8.)

These convenient maxims of reverence and implicit faith were doubtless imprinted with care on the tender minds of youth; since the Magi were the masters of education in Persia, and to their hands the children even of the royal family were entrusted. (Plato in Alcibiad) The Persian priests, who were of a speculative genius, preserved and investigated the secrets of Oriental philosophy; and acquired, either by superior knowledge or superior art, the reputation of being well versed in some occult sciences, which have derived their appellation from the Magi.¹⁶ Those of more active dispositions mixed with the world in courts and cities. It is observed that the administration of Artaxerxes was in a great measure directed by the counsels of the sacerdotal order, whose dignity, either from policy or devotion, that prince restored to its ancient splendor. (Agathias, 1. iv. p. 134)

Spirit of Persecution

The first counsel of the Magi was agreeable to the unsociable genius of their faith,¹⁷ to the practice

¹³ Hyde de Religione Persarum, c. 28. Both Hyde and Prideaux affect to apply to the Magian the terms consecrated to the Christian hierarchy.

¹⁴ Ammian. Marcellin. xxiii. 8. He informs us (as far as we may credit him) of two curious particulars: (1) that the Magi derived some of their most secret doctrines from the Indian Brachmans; and, (2) that they were a tribe or family, as well as order.

¹⁵ The divine institution of tithes exhibits a singular instance of conformity between the law of Zoroaster and that of Moses. Those who cannot otherwise account for it, may suppose, if they please, that the Magi of the latter times inserted so useful an interpolation into the writings of their prophet.

¹⁶ Pliny (Hist. Natur. I. xxx. c. 1) observes that magic held mankind by the triple chain of religion, physics, and astronomy.

¹⁷ Mr. Hume, in the Natural History of Religion, remarks that the most refined and philosophic sects are the most

of ancient kings,¹⁸ and even to the example of their legislator, who had fallen a victim to a religious war, excited by his own intolerant Zeal.¹⁹ By an edict of Artaxerxes, the exercise of every worship, except that of Zoroaster, was severely prohibited. The temples of the Parthians, and the statues of their deified monarchs, were thrown down with ignominy.²⁰ The sword of Aristotle (such was the name given by the Orientals to the polytheism and philosophy of the Greeks) was easily broken (Rabbi Abraham in the *Tarikh Schickard*, pp. 108, 109). The flames of persecution soon reached the more stubborn Jews and Christians;²¹ nor did they spare the heretics of their own nation and religion. The majesty of Ormusci, who was jealous of a rival, was seconded by the despotism of Artaxerxes, who could not suffer a rebel; and the schisms within his vast empire were soon reduced to the inconsiderable number of 80,000. (*Hyde de Religione Persar.* c. 21) This spirit of persecution reflects dishonor on the religion of Zoroaster; but as it was not productive of any civil commotion, it served to strengthen the new monarchy, by uniting all the various inhabitants of Persia in the bands of religious zeal.

Establishment of the Royal Authority in the Provinces; Extent and Population of Persia

Artaxerxes, by his valor and conduct, had wrested the scepter of the East from the ancient royal family of Parthia. There still remained the more difficult task of establishing, throughout the vast extent of Persia, a uniform and vigorous administration. The weak indulgence of the Arsacides had resigned to their sons and brothers the principal provinces, and the greatest offices of the kingdom, in the nature of hereditary possessions. The *vitaxce*, or 18 most powerful satraps, were permitted to assume the regal title; and the vain pride of the monarch was delighted with a nominal dominion over so many vassal kings. Even tribes of barbarians in their mountains, and the Greek cities of Upper Asia,²² within their walls, scarcely acknowledged, or seldom obeyed, any superior; and the Parthian empire exhibited, under other names, a lively image of the feudal system²³ which has since prevailed in Europe. But the active victor, at the head of a numerous and disciplined army, visited in person every province of Persia. The defeat of the boldest rebels, and the reduction of the strongest fortifications,²⁴ diffused the terror of his arms, and prepared the way for the peaceful reception of his authority. An obstinate resistance was fatal to the chiefs; but their followers were treated with lenity.²⁵ A cheerful submission was rewarded with honors and riches; but the prudent Artaxerxes, suffering no person except himself to assume the title of king, abolished every intermediate power between the throne and the people. His kingdom, nearly equal in extent to modern Persia, was bounded by the sea or great rivers on every side.

intolerant.

¹⁸ Cicero de Legibus, ii. 10. Xerxes, by the advice of the Magi, destroyed the temples of Greece.

¹⁹ D'Herbelot Bibliothèque Orientale Zerdnslit. Life of Zoroaster in tom. ii. of the Zendavesta.

²⁰ Compare Moses of Chorene, I. ii. c. 74, with Ammian. Marcellin. xxiii, 6. Hereafter I shall make use of these passages.

²¹ Basnage Histoire des Juifs, 1. viii. c. 3. Sozomen, 1. ii. c. 1. Manes, who suffered an ignominious death, may be deemed a Magian as well as a Christian heretic.

²² These colonies were extremely numerous. Seleucus Nicator founded 39 cities, all named from himself or some of his relations (Appian in Syriac. p. 124). The era of Seleucus (still in use among the Eastern Christians) appears as late as the year 508, of Christ 196, on the medals of the Greek cities within the Parthian empire. Moyle, vol. i. p. 273, etc., and M. Freret, Mem. de l'Académie, tom. xix.

²³ The modern Persians distinguish that period as the dynasty of the kings of the nations. Pun. Hist. Nat. vi. 25.

²⁴ Eutychius (tom. i. pp. 367, 371, 375) relates the siege of the island of Mesene in the Tigris, with some circumstances not unlike the story of Nisus and Scylla.

²⁵ Agathias. ii. 164. The princes of Segestan defended their independence during many years. As romances generally transport to an ancient period the events of their own time, it is not impossible that the fabulous exploits of Rustan, prince of Segestan, may have been grafted on this real history.

By the Euphrates, Tigris, Araxes, Oxitis, and Indus, by the Caspian Sea, and the Gulf of Persia.²⁶ That country was computed to contain, in the last century, 554 cities, 60,000 villages, and about 40 million souls. (Chardin, tom. iii. c. 1, 2, 3) If we compare the administration of the house of Sassan with that of the house of Sefi, the political influence of the Magian with that of the Mahometan religion, we shall probably infer that the kingdom of Artaxerxes contained at least as great a number of cities, villages, and inhabitants. But it must likewise be confessed, that in every age the want of harbors on the seacoast, and the scarcity of fresh water in the inland provinces, have been very unfavorable to the commerce and agriculture of the Persians. In the calculation of their numbers, they seem to have indulged one of the meanest and most common articles of national vanity.

Wars Between the Parthian and Roman Empires

As soon as the ambitious mind of Artaxerxes had triumphed over the resistance of his vassals, he began to threaten the neighboring states, who, during the long slumber of his predecessors, had insulted Persia with impunity. He obtained some easy victories over the wild Scythians and the effeminate Indians; but the Romans were an enemy who, by past injuries and present power, deserved the utmost efforts of his arms. A 40-year tranquillity, the fruit of valor and moderation, had succeeded the victories of Trajan. During the period that elapsed from the accession of Marcus to the reign of Alexander, the Roman and the Parthian empires were twice engaged in war. Although the whole strength of the Arsacides contended with a part only of the forces of Rome, the event was most commonly in favor of the latter. Macrinus, indeed, prompted by his precarious situation and pusillanimous temper, purchased a peace at the expense of near 2 million of our money. (Dion, I. xxviii. p. 133) But the generals of Marcus, the emperor Severus, and his son, erected many trophies in Armenia, Mesopotamia, and Assyria. Among their exploits, the imperfect relation of which would have unseasonably interrupted the more important series of domestic revolutions, we shall only mention the repeated calamities of the two great cities of Seleucia and Ctesiphon.

Cities of Seleucia and Ctesiphon

Seleucia, on the western bank of the Tigris, about 45 miles to the north of ancient Babylon, was the capital of the Macedonian conquests in Upper Asia.²⁷ Many ages after the fall of their empire, Seleucia retained the genuine characters of a Grecian colony: arts, military virtue, and the love of freedom. The independent republic was governed by a senate of 300 nobles. The people consisted of 600,000 citizens. The walls were strong, and as long as concord prevailed among the several orders of the state, they viewed with contempt the power of the Parthian. But the madness of faction was sometimes provoked to implore the dangerous aid of the common enemy, who was posted almost at the gates of the colony. (Tacit. Annal. xi. 42; Plin. list. Nat. vi. 26) The Parthian monarchs, like the Mogul sovereigns of Hindustan, delighted in the pastoral life of their Scythian ancestors; and the Imperial

²⁶ We can scarcely attribute to the Persian monarchy the seacoast of Gedrosia or Macran, which extends along the Indian Ocean from Cape Jast (the promontory Capella) to Cape Goadel. In the time of Alexander, and probably many ages afterward, it was thinly inhabited by a savage people of Fishermen, who knew no arts, who acknowledged no master, and who were divided by inhospitable deserts from the rest of the world. (Arrian de Reb. Indicis.) In the 12th Century, the little town of Taiz (supposed by M. d'Anville to be the Tesa of Ptolemy) was peopled and enriched by the resort of the Arabian merchants. (Geographie Nubiens, p. 58; D'Anville Geographie Ancienne, tom. ii. p. 283.) In the last age the whole country was divided between three princes, one Mahometan and two Idolators, who maintained their independence against the successors of Shaw Abbas. (Voyages de Tavernier, part I. 1. v. p. 635.)

²⁷ For the precise situation of Babylon, Seleucia, Ctesiphon, Modain, and Baghdad, cities often confounded with each other, see an excellent Geographical Tract of M. d'Anville, in Morn. de l'Academie. tom. xxx.

camp was frequently pitched in the plain of Otesiphon, on the eastern bank of the Tigris, at the distance of only three miles from Seleucia. (This may be inferred from Strabo, 1. xvi. p. 743.) The innumerable attendants on luxury and despotism resorted to the court, and the little village of Otesiphon insensibly swelled into a great city.²⁸ Under the reign of Marcus, the Roman generals (AD 165) penetrated as far as Ctesiphon and Seleucia. They were received as friends by the Greek colony; they attacked as enemies the seat of the Parthian kings; yet both cities experienced the same treatment. The sack and conflagration of Seleucia, with the massacre of 300,000 inhabitants, tarnished the glory of the Roman triumph.²⁹ Seleucia, already exhausted by the neighborhood of a too powerful rival, sunk under the fatal blow; but Ctesiphon (AD 198), in about 33 years, had sufficiently recovered its strength to maintain an obstinate siege against the emperor Severus. The city was, however, taken by assault; the king, who defended it in person, escaped with precipitation; 100,000 captives, and a rich booty rewarded the fatigues of the Roman soldiers.³⁰ Notwithstanding these misfortunes, Ctesiphon succeeded to Babylon and to Seleucia, as one of the great capitals of the East. In summer, the monarch of Persia enjoyed at Ecbatana the cool breezes of the mountains of Media; but the mildness of the climate engaged him to prefer Otesiphon for his winter residence.

Conquest of Osrhoene By the Romans

From these successful inroads, the Romans derived no real or lasting benefit; nor did they attempt to preserve such distant conquests, separated from the provinces of the empire by a large tract of intermediate desert. The reduction of the kingdom of Osrhoene was an acquisition of less splendor indeed, but of a far more solid advantage. That little state occupied the northern and most fertile part of Mesopotamia, between the Euphrates and the Tigris. Edessa, its capital, was situated about twenty miles beyond the former of those rivers; and the inhabitants, since the time of Alexander, were a mixed race of Greeks, Arabs, Syrians, and Armenians.³¹ The feeble sovereigns of Osrhoene, placed on the dangerous verge of two contending empires, were attached from inclination to the Parthian cause; but the superior power of Rome exacted from them a reluctant homage, which is still attested by their medals. After the conclusion of the Parthian war under Marcus, it was judged prudent to secure some substantial pledges of their doubtful fidelity. Forts were constructed in several parts of the country, and a Roman garrison was fixed in the strong town of Nisibis. During the troubles that followed the death of Commodus, the princes of Osrhoene attempted to shake off the yoke; but the stern policy of Severus confirmed their dependence,³² and the perfidy of Caracalla completed the easy conquest. Abgarus, the last king of Edessa, was (AD 216) sent in chains to Rome, his dominions reduced into a province, and his capital dignified with the rank of colony. Thus the Romans, about 10 years before the fall of the Parthian monarchy, obtained a firm and permanent establishment beyond the Euphrates.³³

²⁸ That most curious traveler, Bernier, who followed the camp of Aurengzebe from Delhi to Kashmir, describes with great accuracy the immense moving city. The guard of cavalry consisted of 35,000 men and 10,000 infantry. It was computed that the camp contained 150,000 horses, mules, and elephants; 50,000 camels, 50,000 oxen, and between 300,000 and 400,000 persons. Almost all Delhi followed the court, whose magnificence supported its industry.

²⁹ Dion, L lxxi. p. 1178. list. August. p. 38. Eutrop. viii. 10. Euseb. in Chronic. Quadratus (quoted in the Augustati History) attempted to vindicate the Romans by alleging that the citizens of Seleucia had first violated their faith.

³⁰ Dion. I. lxxv. p. 1263. Herodian, I. iii. p. 120. list. August. p. 70.

³¹ The polished citizens of Antioch called those of Edessa mixed barbarians. It was, however, some praise, that of the three dialects of the Syrian, the purest and most elegant (the Aramman) was spoke at Edessa. M. Bayer (Hist. Edess. p. 5) has borrowed this remark from George of Malatia, a Syrian writer.

³² Dion, I. lxxv. pp. 1248, 1249, 1250. M. Bayer has neglected to use this most important passage.

³³ This kingdom, from Osrhoes, who gave a new name to the country, to the last Abgarus, had lasted 353 years. See the learned work of M. Bayer, *Historia Osrhoena et Edessena*.

AD 230: Artaxerxes Claims the Provinces of Asia—Declares War Against the Romans

Prudence as well as glory might have justified a war on the side of Artaxerxes, had his views been confined to the defense or the acquisition of a useful frontier. But the ambitious Persian openly avowed a far more extensive design of conquest. In 230 AD, he thought himself able to support his lofty pretensions by the arms of reason as well as by those of power. Cyrus, he alleged, had first subdued, and his successors had for a long time possessed, the whole extent of Asia, as far as the Propontis and the Aegean Sea. The provinces of Caria and Ionia, under their empire, had been governed by Persian satraps, and all Egypt, to the confines of Ethiopia, had acknowledged their sovereignty.³⁴ Their rights had been suspended, but not destroyed, by a long usurpation. As soon as he received the Persian diadem, which birth and successful valor had placed upon his head, the first great duty of his station called upon him to restore the ancient limits and splendor of the monarchy. The Great King, therefore (such was the haughty style of his embassies to the emperor Alexander), commanded the Romans instantly to depart from all the provinces of his ancestors, and, yielding to the Persians the empire of Asia, to content themselves with the undisturbed possession of Europe. This haughty mandate was delivered by 400 of the tallest and most beautiful of the Persians, who, by their fine horses, splendid arms, and rich apparel, displayed the pride and greatness of their master. (Herodian, vi. 209, 212) Such an embassy was much less an offer of negotiation than a declaration of war. Both Alexander Severus and Artaxerxes, collecting the military force of the Roman and Persian monarchies, resolved in this important contest to lead their armies in person.

If we credit what should seem the most authentic of all records, an oration, still extant, and delivered by the emperor himself to the senate, we must allow that Alexander Severus' victory was not inferior to any of those formerly obtained over the Persians by the son of Philip. The army of the Great King consisted of 120,000 horses clothed in complete armor of steel. It had 700 elephants, with towers filled with archers on their backs, and 1,800 chariots armed with scythes. This formidable host, the like of which is not to be found in eastern history, and has scarcely been imagined in eastern romance,³⁵ was (AD 233) discomfited in a great battle, in which the Roman Alexander approved himself an intrepid soldier and a skilful general. The Great King fled before his valor; an immense booty, and the conquest of Mesopotamia, were the immediate fruits of this signal victory. Such are the circumstances of this ostentatious and improbable relation, dictated, as it too plainly appears, by the vanity of the monarch, adorned by the unblushing servility of his flatterers, and received without contradiction by a distant and obsequious senate. (Hist. August. p. 133) Far from being inclined to believe that the arms of Alexander obtained any memorable advantage over the Persians, we are induced to suspect that all this blaze of

³⁴ Xenophon, in the preface to the *Cyropaedia*, gives a clear and magnificent Idea of the extent of the empire of Cyrus. Herodotus (1. iii. c. 79, etc.) enters into a curious and particular description of the twenty great *Satrapies* into which the Persian empire was divided by Darius Hystaspes.

³⁵ There were two hundred scythed chariots at the battle of Arbela, in the host of Darius. In the vast army of Tigranes, which was vanquished by Lucullus, only 17,000 horses were completely armed. Antiochus brought 54 elephants into the field against the Romans. By his frequent wars and negotiations with the princes of India he had once collected 150 of those great animals. But it may be questioned whether the most powerful monarch of Hindustan ever formed a line of battle of 700 elephants. Instead of 3 or 4,000 elephants, which the Great Mogul was supposed to possess, Tavernier (*Voyages*, part. ii. I. I. p. 198) discovered, by a more accurate inquiry, that he had only 500 for his baggage, and 80 or 90 for the service of war. The Greeks have varied with regard to the number which Pores brought into the field; but Quintus Curtius (viii. 13), in this instance judicious and moderate, is contented with 85 elephants, distinguished by their size and strength. In Siam, where these animals are the most numerous and the most esteemed, 18 elephants are allowed as a sufficient proportion for each of the 9 brigades into which a just army is divided. The whole number of 162 elephants of war, may sometimes be doubled. *Hist. des Voyages*, tom. ix. p. 260.

imaginary glory was designed to conceal some real disgrace.

Our suspicions are confirmed by the authority of a contemporary historian, who mentions the virtues and shortcomings of Alexander with respect and candor. He describes the judicious plan which had been formed for the conduct of the war. Three Roman armies were destined to invade Persia at the same time, and by different roads. But the operations of the campaign, though wisely concerted, were not executed either with ability or success. The first of these armies, as soon as it had entered the marshy plains of Babylon, toward the artificial conflux of the Euphrates and the Tigris,³⁶ was encompassed by the superior numbers, and destroyed by the arrows, of the enemy. The alliance of Chosroes, king of Armenia,³⁷ and the long tract of mountainous country, in which the Persian cavalry was of little service, opened a secure entrance into the heart of Media to the second of the Roman armies. These brave troops laid waste the adjacent provinces, and, by several successful actions against Artaxerxes, gave a faint color to the emperor's vanity. But the retreat of this victorious army was imprudent, or at least unfortunate. In returning back over the mountains great numbers of soldiers perished by the badness of the roads and the severity of the winter season. It had been resolved that while these two great detachments penetrated into the opposite extremes of the Persian dominions, the main body, under the command of Alexander himself, should support their attack by invading the kingdom's center. But the inexperienced youth, influenced by his mother's counsels, and perhaps by his own fears, deserted the bravest troops and the fairest prospect of victory. After languishing all summer in Mesopotamia, he led back to Antioch an army diminished by sickness and provoked by disappointment. Artaxerxes' behavior had been very different. Flying with rapidity from the bills of Media to the marshes of the Euphrates, he had everywhere opposed the invaders in person. In either fortune, he had united with the ablest conduct the most undaunted resolution. But in several obstinate engagements against the veteran legions of Rome, the Persian monarch had lost the flower of his troops. Even his victories had weakened his power. The favorable opportunities of the absence of Alexander, and of the confusions that followed that emperor's death, presented themselves in vain to his ambition. Instead of expelling the Romans from the continent of Asia as he pretended, he found himself unable to wrest from their hands the little province of Mesopotamia.³⁸

Artaxerxes

The reign of Artaxerxes, which from the last defeat of the Parthians (AD 240) lasted only 14 years, forms a memorable era in the history of the East, and even in that of Rome. His character seems to have been marked by those bold and commanding features that generally distinguish the princes who conquer, from those who inherit, an empire. Till the last period of the Persian monarchy his code of laws was respected as the groundwork of their civil and religious policy.³⁹ Several of his sayings are preserved. One of them in particular discovers a deep insight into the constitution of government. "The authority of the prince," said Artaxerxes, "must be defended by a military force; that force can only be maintained by taxes; all taxes must, at last, fall upon agriculture; and agriculture can never flourish except under the protection of justice and moderation."⁴⁰ Artaxerxes bequeathed his new empire, and

³⁶ M. de Tillemont has already observed that Herodian's geography is somewhat confused.

³⁷ Moses of Chorene (Hist. Armen. 1. II c. 71) illustrates this invasion of Media by asserting that Chosroes, king of Armenia, defeated Artaxerxes, and pursued him to the confines of India. The exploits of Chosroes have been magnified; and he acted as a dependent ally to the Romans.

³⁸ For the account of this war, see Herodian, I. vi. pp. 209, 212. The old abbreviators and modern compilers have blindly followed the Augustan History.

³⁹ Eutychius, tom. ii. p. 180, vers. Pocock. The great Chosroes Noushirwan sent the Code of Artaxerxes to all his satraps, as the invariable rule of their conduct.

⁴⁰ D'Herbelot Bibliotheque Orientale, an mot *Ardshir*. We may observe that after an ancient period of fables, and a long

his ambitious designs against the Romans, to Sapor, a son not unworthy of his great father; but those designs were too extensive for the power of Persia, and served only to involve both nations in a long series of destructive wars and reciprocal calamities.

Power of the Persians

The Persians, long since civilized and corrupted, were very far from possessing the martial independence, and the intrepid hardness both of mind and body, which have rendered the northern barbarians masters of the world. The science of war, that constituted the more rational force of Greece and Rome, as it now does of Europe, never made any considerable progress in the East. Those disciplined evolutions which harmonize and animate a confused multitude were unknown to the Persians. They were equally unskilled in the arts of constructing, besieging, or defending regular fortifications. They trusted more to their courage than to their discipline. The infantry was a half-armed spiritless crowd of peasants, levied in haste by the allurements of plunders, and as easily dispersed by a victory as by a defeat. The monarch and his nobles transported into the camp the pride and luxury of the palace. Their military operations were impeded by a useless train of women, eunuchs, horses, and camels, and in the midst of a successful campaign the Persian host was often separated or destroyed by an unexpected famine.⁴¹

But the nobles of Persia, in the bosom of luxury and despotism, preserved a strong sense of personal gallantry and national honor. From the age of seven years they were taught to speak truth, shoot with the bow, and ride; and it was universally confessed that in the two last of these arts they had made a more than common proficiency.⁴² The most distinguished youth were educated under the monarch's eye, practiced their exercises in the gate of his palace, and were severely trained up to the habits of temperance and obedience in their long and laborious parties of hunting. In every province the satrap maintained a like school of military virtue. The Persian nobles (so natural is the idea of feudal tenures) received from the king's bounty lands and houses, on the condition of their service in war. They were ready on the first summons to mount on horseback, with a martial and splendid train of followers, and to join the numerous bodies of guards who were carefully selected from among the most robust slaves and the bravest adventurers of Asia. These armies, both of light and of heavy cavalry, equally formidable by the impetuosity of their charge and the rapidity of their motions, threatened, as an impending cloud, the eastern provinces of the declining empire of Rome.⁴³

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interval of darkness, the modern histories of Persia begin to assume an air of truth with the dynasty of the Sassanides.

⁴¹ Herodian, L vi. p. 214. Ammianus Marcellinus, 1. xxiii. c. 6. Some differences may be observed between the two historians, the natural effects of the changes produced by a century and a half.

⁴² The Persians are still the most skilful horsemen, and their horses the finest, be the East.

⁴³ From Herodotus, Xenophon, Herodian, Ammianus, Chardin, etc., I have extracted such *probable* accounts of the Persian nobility as seem either common to every age, or particular to that of the Sassanides.