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# Mutual influences in the art of Byzantine and Sasanian Empires

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**MUTUAL INFLUENCES IN THE ART OF  
BYZANTINE AND SASANIAN EMPIRES**

By

Dimitris Cacharelias

April 25, 1988

Submitted to the Committee on Undergraduate Honors of Baruch College of the City University of New York in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Art History with Honors.

April 25, 1988

We the undersigned hereby certify that the thesis presented to the Art Department by Dimitris Cacharelias (070-68-1240) and entitled "Mutual Influences in the Art of the Byzantine and Sasanian Empires" has been accepted by the Departmental Honors Committee.

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The purpose of this paper is to compare the art styles of the Early Byzantine and Sasanian Empires, with emphasis on evidence of contact and influence, in order to understand how each dealt with the Greco-Roman past. Mutual influences in the art of the Byzantines and the Sasanians should be viewed as part of a broader historical problem concerning the fall of the Western Roman Empire and the transformation of its Eastern part in what historians now call "Byzantine" which survived and flourished for a thousand more years. Near Eastern ideas, culture and economy played a great role in the transformation and revitalization of the Eastern part of the Roman Empire, and Sasanian and Byzantine relations should be viewed in that context.

The first section of this paper consists of a political and cultural overview of the two realms because during the period in question many changes were taking place. Those complex changes in had a great influence on the artistic expression of the two states and played an important role in the development of their styles.

The second part of the paper examines the art of the two empires. There is no question that both Sasanian and Byzantine artists continue their own artistic styles, developed through previous centuries. What is interesting to examine, though, is the influence that Greco-Roman art had in both states, and how each of them adapted it. We must consider that Byzantium was the heir of the Roman Empire, and continued the Greco-Roman art tradition. We should, however, take into consideration the fact that the Roman - and for our purposes Byzantine - capital lay in the East and its official artistic expression was bound to be influenced by local Near Eastern aesthetics predominant in the area. The Persian, and for the period we will examine Sasanian, empire was the predominant political and cultural power in the area, and we should consider much of the Near Eastern influences in Byzantine art as being originally Sasanian. The Sasanians on the other hand carried through their art the expression of Greek thought and style, introduced to them by the Seleucid colonies in their area. We will see and examine certain decorative motifs and patterns common to both art styles.

Although it is very difficult to draw firm conclusions as to specific artistic influences between the Sasanian and Byzantine empires because of lack of information, complex political events that changed the borders of each realm often, and cultural backgrounds that go far back in time and were formed out of numerous interrelationships, nevertheless we hope to establish a few clear interrelationships between the two art styles, and at least present their unique forms, similarities, and differences.

The time period we will be examining is from 324 to 651 A.D. The Sasanian dynasty was in power in Persia between ca. 224 and 651 A.D. Many scholars set as the beginning of the Byzantine era the year of the move of the capital of the Roman empire to Constantinople, 324 A.D.<sup>1</sup> For our purposes, though, we will need to make references to the Roman empire as it was before 324 A.D., because little changed drastically that year except the administrative center of the empire, and also we will need to refer to previous to Persian dynasties in order to understand Persian art styles better.

To my best knowledge there is no other comparative study of Byzantine and Sasanian art. A book recently published by K. Synelli in Greek concerning the diplomatic relations of the Byzantines and the Sasanians during the sixth century deals. "Primarily with legal documents and treaties. There is little mention of court relations between the two states, something that would be very helpful in determining relations at a less formal level that would involve the exchange of art objects, fashions, and ideas. A dissertation by D.A. Miller submitted to Rutgers University deals only with Byzantine 'diplomacy and mentions Sasanian diplomatic relations only in, a few places. The only other study that is relevant to our subject is a dissertation for the Master of Arts diploma submitted to NYU by E.J. Holmes, on the form and decoration of late Sasanian textiles, which does not deal at all with any Byzantine influence if it exists.

## PART ONE, HISTORY AND CULTURE

In order to better understand the art styles and mutual influences between the two empires, it will be necessary to examine the historical backgrounds and the political and cultural relations of the two states. We will discover that mutual influences did not occur only in the area of art, but they were also most prominent in the diplomatic relations of the two states, many times dictated by the political situation at the time.

We should first describe the administrative systems of the Byzantine and Sasanian empires and try to understand their character. During the period in question both systems were very centralized, and the will of the Emperor or the Great King respectfully was the law. It is thus important to examine the nature of the monarchy in each realm, and the court life in general because the art styles of the Sasanians and Byzantines were greatly influenced by their court life and its demands. Most important, luxury objects were usually desired by each court and were specially made to serve their purposes whether they were decorative or political.

The Persian and the Byzantine empires (see maps A and B) had been the two dominant powers of the Mediterranean and Near Eastern world from about the first century B.C. and continued to dominate his area until the seventh century A.D. Their power covered many different people, from diverse cultural backgrounds and ways of thinking, including Romans, Greeks, Egyptians, Northwest Africans, Parthians, Persians, Armenians, and Syrians. In each capital ideas and art styles from the provinces, tend to mix with each other, creating a unique aesthetic for each period and empire. On a higher level that aesthetic was also influenced by neighboring state. When we consider that the Romans were often at war with the Parthians (Arsakides, ca.250 B.C - ca.224 A.D.) - and later the Byzantines with the Sasanians - and many times regions which belonged to one realm for a century came to belong to the other later, we can understand that frequently the same people would influence the official art of both empires.

At the beginning of the 3rd century A.D., when the Roman Empire was in the process of transformation with the move of the capital to the East, a very important event happened in the East: the Arshakid line of the Parthian dynasty fell, giving way to the new Persian Sasanian dynasty (224-651 A.D.). According to tradition the founder of the dynasty was Ardesir I, grandson of Sasan, who overthrew the Arshakid ruler of the province of Fars, Ardawan V. He then proceeded to subjugate almost all the Arshakid dominions and adopted the former Arshakid winter capital of Ctesiphon as the main capital of the new Sasanian Empire<sup>2</sup>.

The new Sasanian dynasty tried to revive the customs and majesty of the Achemenids (ca.550-331 B.C. and adopted many court ceremonies and much symbolism from them. Strabo (ca. 63 B.C.-ca.19 A.D.), the Roman historian, says about the Sasanians:

The Medes (Achemenides) however, are said to have been originators of customs (of the Armenians) and also still earlier, for the Persians, who were their masters and their successors in rule over Asia. For example, the "Persian" stole, as it is now called, and their (the Medes) zeal for archery and horsemanship, the service they render kings, their ornaments and the divine reverence paid by subjects to kings, came to the Persians from the Medes<sup>3</sup>.

Throughout the Sasanian era, divine legitimacy for kingship was considered the prerogative of the Sasanian family. No other claimant could gain the lasting allegiance of the priests and nobles. Despite his divine right, the monarch could neither ascend nor maintain his throne without the support of these two groups. He was therefore bound to uphold their separate and privileged status. In order to win their approval, the monarch required to demonstrate his capacity for kingship before his accession. Traditionally, therefore, the heir to the throne was appointed to administer a major region like Armenia. He was also scrutinized for signs of divine grace and

fortune which the rightful Sasanian monarch was believed to possess<sup>4</sup>. The king did not hesitate to advertise his divine power to foreign monarchs for obvious political reasons. The Sasanian monarch Shapur II (309-373 A.D.) wrote to the Byzantine emperor Constantius II (351-361 A.D.): "I Shapur, king of kings, partner with the stars, brother of the Sun and Moon, to my brother Constantius Caesar offer most ample greeting."<sup>5</sup> The king was also the supporter of the Zoroastrian faith, the main religion of the Sasanian empire. Within the Zoroastrian community, the Sasanian "Kings of Kings", was regarded as the "first among men." The Zoroastrian priests were judges and ministers of the king. After the priests came the warriors, the scribes and bureaucrats and last were the artisans and peasants. Movement between the classes was practically impossible. Those born into one level of society were not expected to rise to another as it was undesirable that the order be disturbed<sup>6</sup>.

In the Byzantine state the Emperor was the representative of supreme power and authority. Since the time of Diocletian (284-305 A.D.), the Roman emperor had been called God (Numen) and his decrees were considered divine (divina oracula). When the empire was Christianized, the emperor (at least in the East) was believed to receive his power from God himself, and he had the right even to interfere in church matters. The Roman Senate, which still nominally survived in Constantinople, exercised some power over the election of the Byzantine Emperor, as did the people (Populus Romanus), but neither infringe seriously on the Emperor's will. For his legislative and administrative acts the Emperor was responsible to none except to heaven<sup>7</sup>. Below the Emperor were the noble families, then came the merchants who dealt in luxury goods, then the simple workers and the slaves.

The surviving laws of the Roman republic did not allow an emperor to view his position as a hereditary right, but rather as one assigned to him by God, and thus a privilege that God could decide to give to any mortal Christian of the Empire. Nevertheless, as soon as one succeeded in ascending to the throne, he automatically became emperor by divine grace, and he naturally viewed himself as an absolute monarch with unlimited legislative and administrative powers. In that respect, the concept of monarchy for both Sasanians and Byzantines was quite similar, the only difference being that the title of the Emperor was not hereditary in the Byzantine empire, at least during the early period.

The Sasanian state was the only state with which the Byzantines dealt with equality and mutual respect. The reason is that the Persians, unlike the neighboring tribal people, had a long and unique civilization of their own. The Sasanians too had great respect for the "King of the West" as they called the Byzantine emperor. In the throne room of his palace, Khusrau I (Anoshirwan, 531-579 A.D.) kept three golden thrones for the Emperor of China, the King of the Khazars, and the Emperor of Byzantium - the only rulers who might sit in his presence<sup>8</sup>. This indicates the divine brotherhood of kings.

Many times there were attempts, for diplomatic reasons, to bind together the royal houses of the Byzantine and Sasanian realms, by means of marriage or adoption. Procopius, Justinian's historian, (527-565 A.D.) mentions that Khusrau I (531-579 A.D.) had married a Byzantine called Euphemia<sup>9</sup>. There is a report that in 408 A.D. the dying Emperor Arcadius (395-408 A.D.) commended his child successor, Theodosius II (408-457 A.D.), to the Persian king's good will and protection under a kind of guardianship<sup>10</sup>. The Persian King Kawad I (488-531 A.D.) invited Justin to adopt Khusrau I - the later Anoshirvan - as his son<sup>11</sup>. In the 5th century Justinian received Kawad, eldest son of Zanes, who was in turn the eldest son of Kawad I; Kawad had fled the Empire because of the enmity of Khusrau I. He commanded Persian deserters in the Gothic campaigns. The most famous and, in the future the most dangerous pretender supported by the Byzantines was Khusrau II (591-628 A.D.) himself, though he was never in Constantinople<sup>12</sup>.

Despite the good relations the two states sometimes had, there was always an antagonism between them, and many times they came to war. The Byzantines viewed themselves as better and more powerful, continuing the

tradition of the earlier Roman Emperors and their victories over the Parthians (Arshakids). It is interesting to note that although, at the diplomatic level, the Byzantines were obliged to maintain formal relations with the Sasanians, they never stopped referring to the Sasanians and all other foreign peoples as "barbarians" in their public conversation and historical accounts, as their Greek ancestors had done a thousand years earlier. The Sasanians, on the other hand, representing the new force of the Persians, dreamed of reviving the Achaemenid Empire, and considered much of the Byzantine land as theirs. The Persian king was the only foreign monarch to whom the Byzantine Emperors conceded the title Basileus (except the Abyssinian king who hardly counted). As long as there was a great independent Basileus (king) outside the Byzantine Empire, the Emperors refrained from adopting a title which would be shared with another monarch. The title was assumed officially by Heraklius in 629 A.D. after he defeated the Persian Empire<sup>13</sup>.

The antagonism between the two states is clear in some other incidents. When Khusrau II (591-628 A.D.) captured and destroyed Antioch, he returned from the West to build himself a city in Iraq modeled on Antioch, Veh-Antioch-i-Khusrau (The better Antioch of Khusrau), as Shapur I (243-273 A.D.) had done earlier at Veh-Antioch-Shapur (Gundeshapur)<sup>14</sup>.

The wars that took place between the Sasanians and the Byzantines had different meanings for each state. The Byzantines were concerned about securing their eastern frontier at the Euphrates river, and in negotiating a reasonable price for the raw silk that was imported from China where the Sasanians acted as middlemen. The Sasanians held to an expansionist policy, and many times when they conducted war against the West it was for looting in order to enrich their treasury.

One issue that always created problems between the two states was that of the Christians who lived in Persia. The Byzantine emperors naturally viewed themselves as the protectors of the Christian populations of the Sasanian empire, and the Sasanian kings usually blamed the Christians for Sasanian misfortunes, especially when they happened to be at war with Byzantium. The advent of a Christian Emperor on the throne of the "Kingdom of the West" was to the permanent disadvantage of Persian Christians. In particular, for the next century and a half, the fate of the Christian population in Persia was intimately linked with the course of the political relationship between "the two shoulders of the world" (as a synod of 420 A.D. put it)<sup>15</sup>.

In his life of Constantine (324-337 A.D.), Eusebius tells how the Byzantine Emperor, having heard that there were "many Churches of God in Persia and that large numbers were gathered into the fold of Christ, resolved to extend his concern for the general welfare to that country also, as one whose aim it was to be for all alike in every nation." He goes on to give what purports to be a letter from Constantine to the Sasanian Shah, Shapur II (310-379 A.D.). In this comment not only does the Emperor neatly explain away the humiliating capture of his predecessor Valerian (252-260 A.D.) by the Persians in 260 A.D. as divine punishment for his persecution of Christians, but Constantine presumes to draw a lesson from this for Shapur as well: by protecting his own Christian population, Shapur will experience the beneficence of Constantine's deity, the Christian God<sup>16</sup>.

Eusebius speaks of "large numbers of Christians" in Persia in the first half of the fourth century, and there are no good grounds for doubting the general correctness of this statement. Certainly by 410 A.D., when the Synod of Seleucia met under the auspices of the Roman envoy, Bishop Marutha of Martyropolis, there were already six metropolitan sees, and over thirty bishoprics<sup>17</sup>. By the time of the collapse of the Sasanian Dynasty before the Arab armies in the mid-seventh century, there were ten metropolitan sees and ninety-six bishoprics. In the course of the seventh century, several members of the royal family were Christians, as were a number of high officials, such as Khusrau II's doctor, Gabriel of Sinjar, and his chief tax collector Vazdin<sup>18</sup>.

In spite of the Persian king's hostility to Christianity Christian bishops were of great help to him when he needed to send an embassy to the West. The Christian Metropolitans usually spoke Greek, Syriac or Hebrew<sup>19</sup> and thus were very useful as translators. Thomas de Marga in his book of governors describes Persian embassy to the Byzantines:

King Sheroe (Shapur) persuaded the Catholics to select from the dominion of the East certain Metropolitans and Bishops that they may go up to the territory of the Byzantine greeks, at the cost and the expense of the (Persian) King-then Mar Isho Yabhb being obedient to the command of the Good King Sheroe, gathered together Mar Cyriacius, the Metropolitan Bishop of Nisidis...And thus ... the Lord of the World... gave these shepherds many in the sight of the Greeks and they received their assembly and their petition as if they had been angels of God<sup>20</sup>.

The Byzantine church also kept close ties with that of Persia, and many gifts were sent there. According to the "Acts of Peroz" (457-483 A.D.), the Christian community at Seleucia was presented with splendid fittings for its church in 420 A.D. Sabrisho, on becoming Catholicos<sup>21</sup> (metropolitan) in 595 A.D., was sent a gold cross containing a relic of the true cross by Maurice<sup>22</sup>.

Each state directed considerable political propaganda at the people of the other. The Byzantines were famous for the spies they sent to surrounding countries and their diplomatic performance. The Sasanians were not too far behind. When the School of Athens was closed in 529 A.D., many of the Western scholars went to the Court of Khusrau I as temporary residents. Agathias, a Byzantine historian of the time, describes their flight to Persia:

Not long before this Damascius the Syrian, Simplicius the Cicilian, Eulamius the Phrygian, Priscianus of Lydia Hermias and Diogenes from Phoenicia and Isidore of Gaza, all of these, the very flower (to use a poetic term) of the of our time, because they did not share the view of God prevailing among the Romans and thought that the Persian state was far better - they were persuaded by the very widespread tale that the Persian government was supremely just in the union of philosophy and kingship as in the writing of Plato... So therefore, they thought that this as true ... and besides, they had been forbidden by law to live there in security, since they left forthwith for a foreign and wholly alien people, meaning to live there for the rest of their lives. First finding that those in authority were very proud and full of more self-importance at their position warranted. They were disgusted and turned to abuse. Then they saw that there were many burglars and thieves, some who were caught but many who escaped and that every kind of crime was being committed ...<sup>23</sup>

He very clearly shows the competition between the two states. Great King was not as much interested in learning the teachings of Plato as he was in proving that his state was better

One area where the Byzantines were influenced the most by the Sasanians was the court ceremonies. There is much evidence to support the fact that the well-known Byzantine pomp as it evolved, was mostly a series of adoptions of customs which already existed in the court of the "Great King". It will be helpful if we first take a look at some of the ceremonies pertaining to the majesty of the Sasanian King, and then examine the ceremonies in the Byzantine court.

By etiquette the King of the Sasanians remained hidden, inaccessible, and invisible even to the highest dignitaries of his court. Between the sovereign and his household there hung a curtain, concealing him from view. This curtain was ten cubits away from the King and ten cubits away from the position occupied by the highest class in the state. The keeping of this curtain was entrusted to a knight's son, who had the title of Khurrambash, "Be Joyful." When the King received his favorites privately, this knight's son ordered a servant to go on to the roof of the palace and to say at the top of his voice, so as to be heard by all present: "Watch over your speech, for today you are in the presence of the King." The same ceremony was observed at feasts and



concerts. The courtiers stood silently in order of rank, and the Khurram-bash commanded one to sing this piece or that and another to play an instrument in a particular a mode<sup>24</sup>.

The title corresponding to that of Khurram-bash in the Byzantine court was the Praepositus, who was the chief of the eunuchs in the palace. Only eunuchs were allowed to serve the emperor and the empress, and their major requirement was to have a good voice order to be able to sing the fixed hymns required in each ceremony very much the way it was done in the Sasanian capital at Ctesiphon<sup>25</sup>. The fact that the emperor, like the King, also remained hidden behind curtains (not just one but three), the intention of the Byzantines to impress their neighbors by borrowing elements from their ceremonies and elaborating on them. The most characteristic part of the emperor's costume was red boots - it is said that when the last emperor was decapitated in battle (Constantine XI Palaeologus 1449-1453 A.D.) his body was lost, it was recognized by its red boots - and too was borrowed from the King of the Sasanians.

The development of Byzantine court ceremonials reached, if not surpassed, those practiced in Ctesiphon. One of the main reasons the Byzantine emperors decided to adopt such customs was probably fact that the simplicity of the Romans was something neither impressive nor understood in the Near East, where the capital of Empire now lay. To a great extent, the ceremonies and grandeur of the court were part of the necessary pulse beat of Byzantine life; they were physical manifestation of the Emperor's power as viceregent of God, and the articulation of the agreement of the people of the Empire to his God-sent sovereignty. (In most Byzantine ceremonies described in the De Ceremonis of Constantine VII the "Purple-born" (913-959 A.D.), exclamations of the peoples of Constantinople were required and were part of the protocol whenever the emperor went to the Hippodrome, or made any public appearance.)

There is much evidence that during the reign of the Byzantine emperor Justinian (527-565 A.D.), a period that is considered a turning point in Byzantine history, many of the Byzantine court procedures were changed to resemble more closely those of the Sasanians. Procopius, the historian of Justinian, describes in his "Anecdota" or "Secret History" the way the courtiers greeted the Emperor. He first describes what the Roman custom used to be, and then the innovations imposed by Justinian and his wife Theodora. His disapproval of the new protocols is clear:

One of the Patricians worshiped the Emperor by kissing the right side of his chest. And the Emperor would kiss his head and then walk. And then all the others withdrew, bending their right knee. And they never used to worship the Empress. But when Justinian and Theodora would appear at the gate, all the Senators and the Patricians would fall face down on the floor and with legs and hands outstretched would kiss, with their lips, each of his feet. And then they would rise. And Theodora expected the same<sup>26</sup>.

Not only did Byzantine ceremonies become more elaborate, but the "Great Palace" in Constantinople was equipped with devices that were meant to impress the onlooker, particularly the foreign onlooker, like trees filled with singing birds, roaring lions at the throne room, mechanical devices that would create music (organa), and the throne of Solomon itself<sup>27</sup>. The policy of the Byzantines towards foreign embassies varied according to the desired impression. Looking at references concerning the embassies of the Sasanians it is clear that the intention of the Byzantines was to impress and at the same time intimidate the Sasanians.

The De Ceremonis of Constantine VII (913-959 A.D.) provides us with accounts of an old ceremony, obviously of interest to Constantine as antiquarian, the sixth century reception of the Great Embassy of the Persians. "We are told that the Persians were housed in Chalcedon, not in the city itself. When the Persian legate was called into the emperor's presence, he and his delegation entered the palace through the "Royal Gate" and paused in the Schola of the Magister Officiorum while the Magister announced them. The silention or reception was held at

the time in the Great Consistory. The envoy was placed before the Great Veil (there were three door-ways and three veils) and then was admitted to prostrate himself and to give and receive ceremonial greetings. His gifts were carried through the veils"**28**.

As was mentioned above, one of the major problems between Sasanians and Byzantines was the silk trade. Ever since the Central Asian route for Chinese export was opened, the Persian Empire, both under Parthian and Sasanian rule, was the sole channel for transmission of silk goods, in whatever form, from Central Asia westward. The Persians were jealous of their monopoly as middlemen and guarded it until the sixth century when silk culture was introduced into Byzantium under Justinian**29**.

Procopius, the court chronicler of Justinian and a contemporary of Khusrau I (531-579 A.D.), describes at length the role of Persia in its wars with Byzantium. He even cites the high price of silk demanded by the Persians as the primary reason for the deterioration of Persian-Byzantine relations**30**.

The raw silk travelled by way of the caravan cities of Central Asia, through Bactria, to Iran and then west to the ports of Syria where it was woven. The Romans, in order to circumvent the high prices of the Persian middlemen, had sought a route, also by sea, from the west coast of India, making use of the prevailing monsoon winds. The silk would reach ports in Egypt on the Red Sea, which gave rise to a thriving silk center in Egypt**31**.

Silk was one of the luxury goods the Byzantine court had a great need for and could not live without. The silk weavers, the goldsmiths and other producers of luxury goods formed a separate class in both empires that was protected with special laws. The production of works of art by craftsmen working within the Sasanian Empire was strictly controlled. Shapur II (309-379A.D.), the first monarch to define royal authority and to curtail the rights of both the high nobility and clergy, also achieved the organization of lower levels of society. Artisans were separated into corporations according to metier. Each organization had an elected head, and over all the artisans there was a chief, Karagbed, appointed by the king**32**.

It was much the same in Constantinople. We know that all industries in the city fell under a strict state control: the book of the Eparch makes this quite clear. In the case of food services, such as the preparation of bread and meat, the Imperial aim was the safeguarding of the well-being of the city. The workers in luxury goods, however, particularly those who manufactured certain kinds of silk goods and brocades, the kekolymena or "forbidden cloth," worked in precious metals and were controlled for other reasons. The purchase of this type of goods might be so circumscribed that the government was almost the only buyer.

The state did this in order to assure that its own considerable needs would always be met as far as the equipment of Church and Court was concerned, for in the ceremonial of the Byzantine capital luxury was literally a necessity. The state, by its controls on purchasing, also maintained the value of the sumptuary goods which Byzantium sent in many forms as gifts to the barbarians.

Fabricators of gold ornaments and furniture were called barbarikarii, makers of goods destined for and desired by the barbarians. At the time of the Nika revolts in Constantinople during the reign of Justinian (532 A.D.), the quarters of the sumptuary artisans, or at least the members of the Imperial guilds, were moved into close proximity to the Great Palace, and here they remained**33**.

The close ties between the two empires and the mutual respect between their courts, their diplomatic relations, their sophisticated centralized systems of government, and their common economical and political interests, became a fertile ground for the exchange of culture, ideas and art styles between the two realms. Their art, we will examine in the next part of this paper.

## PART TWO, ART

Although the arts of the Sasanians and Byzantines are essentially different from each other, we should be able to trace their development through time and try to explain any common influences or parallel developments in style and expression. For reasons of convenience we will examine parallel developments in the two artistic styles first, influences of Byzantine art in Sasanian art second, and influences of Sasanian to Byzantine art at the end.

It is clear from historical accounts, literature, and depictions in various media surviving, that, unlike in our present society or other previous ones, the most prestigious symbols of wealth in the Byzantine and Sasanian empires were considered the products of silk first, and jewelry second. Very few examples of Sasanian jewelry survive, and the only sources of information are literary descriptions or rock relief sculptures, although we have far more jewelry pieces surviving from earlier periods of Sasanian art. There is not a convincing explanation as to why Sasanian jewelry did not survive, and the one given by the Byzantine historian Procopius is not enough evidence: He says that the wearing of gold ornaments was a prerogative which could be granted only by the king. The Sasanian king issued this gracious permission as a mark of honor and a reward. He himself actually presented jewels to those whom he would especially single out, the supreme commendation being conveyed by the gift of a gold and pearl tiara<sup>34</sup>.

One of the few examples of Sasanian sumptuary metal work we have is the so-called cup of Khusrau I (531-579 A.D.) (plate 1). It is a gold dish with carved crystal and colored glass-paste inlays. The bright red, green, and gold colors and the absolute symmetry give us a good idea of the color aesthetic of Sasanian jewelry, and this agrees closely with the literary sources.

Examples of silk textiles from early Byzantine or Sasanian periods only exist in fragments. But we can also get an idea of how these materials looked from mosaic and literary depictions and rock reliefs. Most of the Sasanian designs, like the Byzantine, are friezes of some motif, most of them geometric. On plate 2 we see Sasanian rosette motifs enclosed in diamond shapes, on the middle and bottom fragments, and friezes of birds and lotus blooms on the top one. The original colors were red and black or green. On plate 3 the pattern is made of medallions enclosing a rooster or an abstract floral design.

It is interesting to see how the various silk and other textiles and jewelry were used by the Sasanian and Byzantine courts as parts of the courtiers' costumes and accessories. The richness of texture and the brightness and variety of color seem to create an impression similar to that of the imposing and solemn ceremonies in both courts, their main purpose being to emphasize the absolute power and magnificence of the King or the Emperor. From the rock reliefs of Taq-i-Bustan we get more information about Sasanian textiles as used for the clothing of the King and his courtiers. On plate 4 (drawn detail from the boar hunt of plate 5, upper left corner) we see the garments of a frieze depicting courtiers, all of them decorated with rather naturalistic renditions of ducks and other birds.

Heavily decorated garments do not seem to have been the fashion in the early centuries of the Sasanian empire. In the later period and especially during the reign of Khusrau I (531-579 A.D.), Sasanian court dress reached its richest form. The shoulders of many of the robes of the nobles in the depiction of the boar hunt are embellished by rectangles of heavily embroidered material which are reminiscent of epaulettes. Possibly the decoration represents the fastening of the robe. The practice of decorating the shoulders of garments with medallions and other designs is not uncommon. Coptic tunics from Egypt of the fifth century A.D. are often adorned in this fashion. A century later in the mosaics of San Vitale, figures (plate 6) wear long robes decorated with patterns at the shoulders<sup>35</sup>.

The caftans of the Sasanian king and his entourage are enriched at the waist by wide jewelled belts. The belt is closed by an ordinary buckle and the surface of the belt is sometimes divided into tiny panels, each containing what seems to be a large jewel in a circular setting (plate 4). Jewelled belts are found on Early Christian and Byzantine monuments. We should not consider this as an influence of one culture on the other but as a common custom in the area of the Near East. The love of static arrangements and symmetrical grouping is typical of Sasanian art and here echoes the balance and formal treatments of the belts worn by the king and the nobles. This preference though, is never carried too far, for there are always elements in the costume design which help to break the absolute symmetry<sup>36</sup>.

An earlier example of belts worn by Persian kings comes from the Parthian era of the depiction of King of Hatra Sanatruq (2nd cent. A.D.) (plate 7). We notice that he wears bracelets tightly around his wrists. Similar ones were worn throughout the Byzantine era by the emperor and the nobles (plates 6, 8, 9). On plate 8 we also notice that the quality and the design of the pearl-embroidered front of the Roman consul of the West (530 A.D.) Rufius Genadius' dress is not much different of that of Sanatruq. Bracelets worn tightly around the wrist give an appearance of embroidered cuffs (plate 4) for they are wide and are always seen in pairs, one on each wrist. Like the jeweled belts, bracelets seem to be common accessories in Near Eastern dress. Nevertheless, the design of Sasanian court robes is essentially different from that of the Byzantines as a whole, because Sasanian dress uses trouser-skirts lifted on the sides and caftans, elements first used by people on the eastern border of the Sasanian empire<sup>37</sup>. (plate 10)

Looking at textile fragments from Byzantine and Sasanian workshops we find many similarities in the decorative motifs used. Craftsmen and artisans of the two realms often moved from one empire to the other, either for economic reasons or because of commissions given by the king or the emperor of the neighboring country as a sign of good will. (Byzantine silk weavers emigrated to Ctesiphon because of the enforcement of a silk monopoly by the state in the reign of Justinian)<sup>38</sup>. Workers in sumptuary goods, or other kinds of artisans were strictly controlled in both Byzantine and Sasanian states. Because of the nature of their profession they could only be employed by the government, and if there were not enough commissions available they often accepted offers from neighboring countries. When Khusrau II (591-628 A.D.) decided to recreate the famous throne of the Achaemenids, which was actually a pavilion comparable to the size of the Persepolis Hall of one Hundred Columns, he recruited craftsmen from the Byzantine empire to help in the construction and decoration<sup>39</sup>. The fact of the matter is that despite the wars and the antagonism between the two realms there was communication among the common people, and that aesthetic taste of the Byzantine and Sasanian weavers was not that different. There are many examples of common influences in textile patterns or in dress we can notice in the culture of the Byzantines and the Sasanians. On plate 11 we see a fragment of Sasanian textile made out of wool and cotton, of a late period, depicting birds with long legs in medallions. This kind of material was very durable and it was probably used for interior decoration of Persian houses, or as a carpet. From the reliefs of Taq-i-Bustan we find the courtiers wearing textiles of a similar pattern (plate 4). The birds comprise friezes, being placed in mirror symmetry poses in both examples. If we look at the embroidered part of the cape of Justinian from the mosaics of Ravenna (plate 6), we see a very similar motif with birds enclosed in medallions, the only difference being that each frieze does not make mirror symmetry. We also observe the same in the pattern of one of Theodora's attendants' dress on plate 12.

Patterns and colors similar to those used on Byzantine textiles can be seen when used as architectural elements. On plate 13 are mosaic decorations from the left entrance to the Church of Hagia Sophia built by Justinian (532-537 A.D.). The colors and the aesthetic is similar in the textiles worn by two saints, St. Andronicus and the other unknown, from mosaics of the monastery in Chora, Constantinople (plate 14), or by the women in attendance of Theodora in the mosaics of San Vitale (plate 12).

One of the most usual representations of the Sasanian King is in a hunting scene. Hunting seems to be a favorite sport, not only of the Sasanians, but of most Near Eastern rulers. Unlike the symbolic meaning of power control and harmony that Sasanian hunting scenes have, Byzantine emperors do not officially depict themselves as hunters. When such scenes occur in the Byzantine world, they mostly serve decorative purposes like the mosaic from Hagia Sophia, recently restored (plate 15). Another symbol common in the two cultures but with different meaning to each is the eagle. For the Byzantines it represented the power of their empire. An example of it we can see depicted on a silk shroud of eleventh century (plate 16). For the Persians the eagle was symbol in a Zoroastrian religious context, here depicted in a silver bowl as the bird Garudha, holding Anahita, goddess of fruitfulness (late Sasanian, plate 17). Although there is no evidence to suggest that the motif was borrowed from one state or the other, the similarities between them are striking even though the media of the two illustrations are different. The exchange of artisans and sumptuary goods between the two empires could be a reasonable explanation of such similarities, rather than suggesting a parallel development.

### **Greek Influences in Sasanian Art**

When the Arshakid dynasty came to power, although it dissolved part of the Hellenistic Kingdom of the Seleucids (map C), established by Alexander the Great's general Seleucus I Nicator (312-ca.250 B.C.), it nevertheless adopted many Greek ways, namely in dress (plate 18, fig. c) or in design motifs (plate 19). The reason the Arshakids were so much influenced by Hellenistic art styles and behavior can be easily explained. Arshak of Parthyene, (ca. 250 B.C.) the founder of the dynasty, was a nomadic chief who succeeded in gaining independence from the Seleucid ruler Antiochus II Theos (261-246 B.C.). Persia at the time had been under Hellenistic rule for almost one hundred years. The empire of the Seleucids consisted of a great number of colonies founded by each ruler, spread out in Iranian territory. The Greek settlers were the ruling minority of the colonies and always avoided mixing with the local inhabitants<sup>40</sup>. Although those colonies did not survive for long periods of time nevertheless they left their imprint on the already existing Persian culture. Their success in my opinion, primarily lay in the fact that the Seleucid colonies were spread out through a vast territory, always occupying important travel routes or replacing already existing Persian cities, thus spreading their customs and civilization to a great range of territory with relatively few settlers. It was then natural for a newly born dynasty coming out of a nomadic tribe to adopt parts of the culture of the pre-existing power in the area. When the Sasanians came into power they viewed the Arshakids as tyrants, and the time between their rule and that of the Achemenids (331 B.C. - 224 A.D.) they considered as "dark ages" <sup>41</sup>.

The Sasanians developed their own artistic style, but in it they incorporated the Hellenistic influence they inherited from the previous Arshakid dynasty. The Zoroastrian religion of the Sasanian dynasty played a major role in influencing the subject matters of its art. Many characteristics of Sasanian art are inconsistent with Zoroastrian thought and beliefs. The representations reveal the presence of certain attitudes that govern the execution of the works of art: a concern for order and clarity;<sup>42</sup> a preoccupation with the theme of contest, usually represented by humans hunting but also illustrated by struggles between certain animals and birds; and an acceptance of an established social structure which led to regulations and controls in the production and design of art objects. On an intellectual plane, similar concepts are expressed in the Zoroastrian texts. The religious writings and the art are therefore, in harmony and provide, at different levels, a sense of the character and spirit of the Sasanian era<sup>43</sup>.

It is very possible that the Sasanians were directly influenced by the Byzantines but such a statement is very difficult to prove, for the following reason: Sasanian art, like Byzantine, has been much influenced by the Hellenistic tradition, and it is practically impossible to separate which elements of Hellenistic art were borrowed directly from the Arshakids, or from the neighboring Byzantine state. It is interesting to see though, how each realm responded to a common influence, Hellenistic art, through the development of its own artistic style.

Sasanian dress, particularly for women, has a strong Hellenistic influence. On plate 18 we see a drawn reproduction of the dress of a court attendant as depicted in the rock reliefs of Taq-i-Bustan (ca. 6th cent. A.D.). On plate 20 we see a typical Byzantine dress of the noble class as depicted in the "Procession of Virgins" from Saint Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna Italy (4th cent. A.D.). On plate 21 we see a typical Hellenistic female dress as depicted on the silver plate from the Mildenhall treasure of the 4th century A.D. The Sasanian dress has many of the aesthetic qualities of the Hellenistic dress: great attention to the drapery, an outer garment worn over the chiton, or aestheta for the female dress, fastened at the shoulder with a pin. The most obvious difference is that, unlike the Hellenistic, the Sasanian dress is clad with precious stones, and the sleeves of the inner garment are tight around the arms. Comparing the Sasanian dress with the Byzantine of around the same period (plate 20), we will find even more similarities. The overall aesthetic quality of both dresses is practically the same, both dresses are clad with jewelry, the inner garment is long down to the feet with tight sleeves and draped, the outer wrapped around the body.

Through out most of the Sasanian period, the repertory of designs consisted of subjects having a symbolic or religious value, rather than a purely decorative or secular purpose. Many of the symbols were of ancient Near Eastern origin: The King standing on defeated enemy (plate 22), the King Hunting (plate 23), birds of prey devouring animals (plate 24). Motifs adopted from the West achieve widespread popularity for the first time in the Sasanian period: small winged figures (plate 25), vine scrolls with figures of animals and birds (plate 26), female dancers with scarves (plate 27) and other themes connected in Hellenistic (and later Greco-Roman) art with the cult of Dionysos<sup>44</sup>. On plate 21 we see two Greco-Roman examples of Dionysiac female dancers with scarfs coming from the silver plates of the treasure of Mildenhall (4th -5th cent. A.D.). The Sasanian dancer wears a see-through garment close to her body while the Roman one wears a material similar to the Sasanian, the difference being that it is loosely hung on the body to create rich drapery. Both dancers hold the scarf in similar ways. The breasts of the Greco-Roman dancers are uncovered, creating the same impression as the Sasanian see-through material.

Victory figures (plate 25) probably traveled to Iran from Greece through the Hellenistic Kingdoms of Egypt and Asia Minor. Later, during the Sasanian art period they became very popular and they were frequently used as architectural decorations. The Victory figure from Taq-i-Bustan rock reliefs in Central-Western Persia decorates the right side of an apse (plate 25). Its similarity to those depicted on the side relief of a child's sarcophagus in Constantinople from the 4th century A.D. is striking (plate 28). The figures on the sarcophagus are supposed to be angels.

Victory figures were renamed angels when the Empire was Christianized, but their form did not change at all. During the Roman period they were usually used to decorate the spandrels of triumphal arches (plate 29) and they probably were directly copied by the Sasanians.

The influence of Hellenistic art resulted in works like the Sasanian silver plate of the 5th century on plate 30. Although there are many theories about what the subject matter is, the influence of Hellenistic or Greco-Roman style is nevertheless clear in the noses, hair and muscular bodies of the two youths.

Great influence from Hellenistic art we can mostly find not as much in figural representations of the period, as we do in, decorative motifs and patterns. Some of the most widely copied Hellenistic motifs were the vine scroll, the heart motif, and the spade motif. The vine scroll was one of the most popular Greco-Roman motifs adopted by the Sasanians. Many times they just borrowed the scroll and then added rosettes to it or other floral forms (plate 31) to create a distinctly Sasanian aesthetic. The detail of a rock relief from Taq-i-Bustan depicting

an arabesque floral design is very similar to the vine scroll emerging from a cup in a mosaic of the Choir of San Vitale (plates 32 and 33). The grapes have been replaced by half palmettes, and the vine leaves by palm leaves.

The heart motif, both as a single unit and multiplied to form borders and trellis patterns, has a long history. Like the spade motif, it is derived from Greco-Roman ivy leaf. Its importance is not felt until the fifth to sixth centuries A.D. , when it appears on Egyptian textiles and Syrian mosaics. At about the same period or slightly later it became popular in Iranian art. It does not seem to make an appearance before the end of the Sasanian dynasty (6th cent. A.D.) and is then carried over into Post-Sasanian art. If its ultimate origins seem easy to trace, it is still difficult to account for its extreme popularity in the fifth and sixth centuries A.D. It appears suddenly in Egypt, Syria and Iran at about the same period<sup>45</sup>.

The spade motif seems to have traveled from the Greco-Roman world to Coptic Egypt, Byzantium and Syria, and then crossed to Persia<sup>46</sup>. On plate 34 we see the spade motif forming the border pattern of the medallion enclosing the charioteer. The fragment comes from Constantinople, dating around the eighth century. On plate 35 we see an Egyptian textile showing hunters killing a lion. The scene is very similar to those on plate 36 which depicts hunters killing wild animals in the circus from a fifth century consular diptych. The spade motif again forms the frieze of the medallion pattern that encloses the hunting scene. On plates 37 and 38 we see stucco fragments of architectural elements from the Sasanian palace at Ctesiphon.

### **Sasanian influences in Byzantine Art**

As the heir of Greco-Roman culture and art, early Byzantine art employs many of its characteristics. In sculpture, painting and mosaic construction, the proportions of the figures, the natural drapery and decorative designs, bear the stamp of Hellenistic art as it was passed to the Romans and later inherited by the Byzantines. On plate 39 we see a mosaic pavement from the Great Palace of the Byzantine emperors in Constantinople dated from the mid fifth to the early sixth century A.D. It depicts two children riding a camel. The proportions of the bodies of the two children, the youth holding the camel, and the camel itself are natural. There is expression of movement, and the figures stand successfully in space, although there is no indication of background except for a small tree depicted at the left of the mosaic. The drapery of the youth's chiton hangs naturally and his features are very expressive. Similar observations can be made about a Silenus and a Maenad depicted dancing in a silver from Constantinople(?) dated between 610-629 A.D. (plate 40). Their bodies show a great sense of movement, their motions and their drapery are natural.

However early Byzantine art is not just the continuation of Hellenistic art styles. What became known as the static and imposing figure representations of Byzantine art has its roots in Near Eastern and Sasanian aesthetics. It can not be proven that elements of Near Eastern origin present in Byzantine art come from Sasanian art, but the Sasanian empire was the other influential power in the area, and, like the Byzantine, was a multi-national empire that incorporated many current art styles. Comparing the figures of the Consul Anastasius (517-518) (plate 41) and the Sasanian king Khusrau I (534-579 A.D.) (plate 1, center medallion), we can see many similarities in the way they are represented. Both are frontal, erect, and rigid. Much detail is also given to their insignia. Although the representation of Khusrau is in the center of the cup and it is carved on crystal in miniature proportions, his crown and other royal insignia are clearly recognizable. In the ivory diptych of the consul the artists does not seem to have devoted as much effort to representing the facial features of the consul or to creating a convincing three-dimensional space, as he does to depicting the quality of dress and the representation of his scepter.

The strong diplomatic relations between the Sasanian and the Byzantine empires which were described in the previous section, occasioned the exchange of many official presents between the two courts. Such presents were presumably both of the highest quality and most representative of the official taste of each realm. The Emperor

Aurelian allegedly received from Shapur I (303-379 A.D.) a bowl "on which was engraved the Sun-God in the same attire in which he was worshipped in the very temple where the mother of Aurelian had been a priestess"**47**.

Jewelry was also used by the Sasanian King as diplomatic presents to the Byzantine emperor. We have examples of the exchange of such gifts between the two empires. Khusrau II (591 -628 A.D.); sent to the Byzantine emperor Maurice an amber table three cubits (C. 5 feet) in diameter, supported on three gold feet enriched with precious stones. The first foot imitated the forefoot and paw of a lion; the second an antelope foot with the hoof; the third, an eagle's claw with its nails. All the animal legs have obvious symbolic reference, the lion and the eagle being standard sun animals, commonly associated with royalty, while the antelope continued as an ancient emblem of the moon**48**.

As we saw in the previous section the great demand for silk products by the Byzantine court was the cause of Justinian's wars with the Sasanian King. Byzantine luxury textiles employed a great variety of designs and qualities of fabric because, for one reason, they were meant to correspond to a great range in social status and relations. Examples of Byzantine textiles exist either in fragments or as represented in mosaics and miniature paintings. On plate 34 we see a later silk textile probably made Constantinople, (10th - 11th cent. A.D.) depicting a consul or emperor in a chariot, and at the bottom, boys pouring money in street. It was customary for the emperor to give money to the people upon his ascent to the throne, another Sasanian Custom. The color of the original is yellow and black. A vivid example of textile patterns at the time of Justinian is shown in mosaics in Ravenna, especially the one depicting Theodora and attending ladies (plate 12). From the wall paintings and mosaics in the monastery in Chora, Constantinople, (Middle Byzantine period, ca.717-1025 A.D.) we can see the kind of textile patterns produced when Byzantine textile production was its peak in the eighth century (plates 42, 43). The mosaic on plate 42 and the wall painting on plate 43 depict most probably saints dressed in the imperial stola. It is clear that the variety of patterns and the brightness of color is great.

The effect of the Sasanian and also Byzantine textiles was not due as much to the design as to the bright colors, suggested by the variety of designs. From Arab sources**49** we get some descriptions of the colors of the King's dress: "Sasan, the founder of the dynasty, is said to have been dressed in a coat of azure color, red loose drawers worked with flowers and a crimson and green crown**50**. "Hormuz wore a red embroidered tunic, green breeches and green and gold crown"**51**. The dominant color in IMP these descriptions is red. Red color and especially a shade of it called porphyra (purple) was associated with royalty in the Byzantine court. Textiles dyed with that color, which came out of a certain kind of sea-shell after laborious treatments, were the most highly priced in the empire and abroad. The love for bright colors does not seem to be restricted only to Byzantine or Sasanian tastes, but it was common to the Romans and the Greeks.

Byzantine works of art were influenced by the Sasanians not so much in design as in aesthetic values. The elegance and emphasis on detail and design in Hellenistic jewelry (plate 44) is replaced by a new style which loves big colorful stones in their raw form (plate 45) and by crowns and official court dresses studded with precious stones. The richly draped Roman dress is slowly replaced by stiff brocades with colorful designs, most obvious in imperial costume (plate 46).

Dramatic change occurred in the symbols of power the Byzantine court used. In plate 47 we see the statue of the emperor Marcian (?) (450-457 A.D.) in the city of Valetta in Malta. We can still recognize the Roman insignia of a general as being those of the emperor. By the time of the reign of Justinian, about one hundred years later, the official representations of the emperor have changed greatly. In the mosaics in Ravenna (plate 6) Justinian is depicted in long "chlamys" with heavy embroidery on its side and also around the wrists of his inner garment. He wears red boots, like the Sasanian Kings, and the crown on his head is emphasized. The "chlamys" itself is a



garment deriving from the Greco-Roman tradition. Underneath it we can just see that he wears a short "chiton" like those worn by Roman soldiers. The obvious changes are in the headdress, the narrow sleeved "chiton" with decorative bracelets, and the overall quality of the garments. Much emphasis is given to the large stones that compose the crown and the fibula that keeps the "chlamys" in place, and also to the brocaded part of the "chlamys". Narrow sleeved garments were worn by the Sasanians and other Near Eastern people, and the emphasis on jewelry has certainly a lot to do with customs of the Sasanian court. If we are to believe Procopius, the wearing of gold ornaments was a prerogative which could be granted only by the Sasanian King (page 26).

The love for large and impressive jewelry was also most probably borrowed from the Sasanians. A representative example is the shape and the effect of the Byzantine crown as it evolved in the early Byzantine period. The Byzantine Emperor's dress represented the Imperator or Commander-in-Chief of the army, and no formalities were connected with its assumption. It was otherwise with the crown, which in the Sasanian kingdom from which it was borrowed, was placed on the king's head in a formal ceremony<sup>52</sup>. The crown was introduced to the Byzantines by Constantine the Great<sup>53</sup>. Although the emperors adopted the crown from the time of Constantine, its visual effect and style never really paralleled that of the Sasanians, at least until the seventh century. Byzantine crowns, like Sasanian, made use of large and colorful stones and pearls. Although the aesthetic sought was similar, nevertheless the Byzantine crown did not reach the size and elaborate design of the Sasanian. An early example representative of a Byzantine crown is the one worn by Justinian from the mosaics of San Vitale (plate 6). It is interesting to note that the empresses' crowns were more elaborate and closer to Sasanian prototypes. Theodora's crown is more impressive than Justinian's (plate 12) and the same can be said of those of later empresses (plates 46, 48).

Each Sasanian king had his own unique crown by which he could be recognized. On plate 49 we see the crown of Peroz I (459-484 A.D.), and on plate 50 we see the one of Khusrau II (590-628 A.D.). Usually Sasanian crowns used the symbols of the moon or, the sun to symbolize the divine origin of the king. Most of the effect of the famous Sasanian crown, evidently came from the magnificence of the precious stones. Theophylactus, a Byzantine historian of the sixth century describes the crown in use at the time of Hormizd IV (579-590 A.D.):

The tiara was of gold and ornamented with stones, emanating a dazzling splendor from the encrusted carbuncles, and framed with a row of pearls that glistened against the hair, mingling their undulating rays with the beautiful splendor of the emeralds. So looking upon it, the eye was almost petrified in an insatiable astonishment<sup>54</sup>.

Even more famous is the crown that belonged to Khusrau II (591-628 A.D.). It consisted of sixty "man" (an ambiguous weight) of pure gold, encrusted with pearls that looked like sparrow's eyes, with garnet rubies that lit up the shadows and were used as lights on dark nights, and with emeralds, the very sight of which melted the viewer's eyes. A gold chain, seventy cubits (c. 116 feet) long, was hung from the ceiling of the palace, and the crown was attached to that chain so that it touched the King's head without bothering him or weighing on him<sup>55</sup>.

Among the various power symbols the Sasanians used was the Senmurv motif. This is a mythical animal composed of the head of a dog, the body and front feet of a lion, the wings of an eagle and the tail of a peacock. It would seem from existing material that the Senmurv only appeared in the sixth to seventh century A.D. during the reign of Khusrau II. Perhaps the beast was the creation of the king who wished to have a powerful emblem (plate 51). The Senmurv was much imitated by the Byzantines, but only as a textile or sculptural motif, treated rather decoratively (plates 51 fig. B, 52). The Senmurv appears in different media in the Sasanian empire, on the pattern of the King's dress, as depicted in the reliefs of Taq-i-Bustan, a silk twill fragment enclosed in a gosh pattern, or in metalwork on a ewer (plate 53).

Not only decorative motifs were borrowed from the Sasanians but Near Eastern customs and iconography were adopted by the Byzantine court and its official art. The theme of depicting the ruler stepping on his enemy was

one of the motifs adopted by the Byzantines from the Sasanians. On plate 54 Emperor Basil, the Macedonian (867-886 A.D.), is depicted on a larger scale than his defeated enemies who worship his feet, bowing to the floor. It is clear that behind such representations lay the conscious policy of the imperial power to depict itself with symbols more familiar to the Near Eastern populations it ruled. On plate 55 we see a mosaic from the floor of the Imperial Palace in Constantinople depicting an eagle attacking a snake. Similar subjects are also carved on the marble iconostasi of the monastery of Great Lavra, dating from the eighth or ninth century A.D. (plate 56). The theme of contest, as we saw in an earlier part of the paper is characteristic of the Zoroastrian religion of the Sasanians and it is very common depiction in their art.

On plate 5 we see a reconstruction of the Royal Hunt depicted on the rock reliefs of Taq-i-Bustan, in the area of modern Central-Western Persia, drawn by Sir Robert Ker Porter in 1818. There are different dates for the reliefs the most popular placing it during the reign of Khusrau I (531-579). The king is depicted in the middle of the composition and he is the largest figure. Courtiers around him are on much smaller scale, and musicians even smaller. The reference to the importance of the king in Persian society, together with the clear distinction between classes is obvious. Order, organization and symmetry are clear throughout the composition of the boar hunt. The elephants are lined up in rows on the left and the groups of animals surrounding the King balance the left to the right and the top to the bottom scenes. On plate 57 we see the Byzantine Emperor Anastasius I (?) (491-518 A.D.) from the Barberini ivory.

Although the two representations seem very different, there are some qualities that are similar in both. The emperor is depicted in the middle of the composition, his figure being the central and largest. His general is on the left in considerably smaller scale, followed by the defeated Scythians and Indians, even smaller in size, offering tribute at the bottom. Similar preference for order we see here too. The composition is divided in three parts, the two panels at top and bottom, the two panels at left and right sides, and the central panel depicting the emperor. The parts are clearly separated by decorative friezes.

## CONCLUSION

Between the third and the seventh centuries A.D. the Byzantine and the Sasanian Empires represented the strongest political powers in the area of Near East. Each realm developed its own unique character, although the common background of Hellenistic tradition became a major reason for similarities in artistic expression in the arts of the two empires.

The equal respect with which the Byzantine and Sasanian courts dealt with each other, along with common frontiers and interests in the political and commercial fields, helped to increase communication between the two empires and encourage exchange of ideas and artistic styles.

The Sasanian dynasty viewed itself as the heir of the Achemenids, and tried to imitate the symbols of power and the art they produced. We can say that Sasanian art is a mixture of Hellenistic and earlier Achemenid art styles. Byzantine rulers, on the other hand, always considered themselves as legitimate Roman Emperors, and early Byzantine art, continuing the Greco-Roman tradition, is primarily Hellenistic with strong influences from the Near East.

The two empires were composed of variety of ethnicities which carried their own languages, religions and customs, and required great tolerance among them in order to live peacefully under the power of a common sovereign. This tolerance may explain the readiness of the Byzantine or Sasanian artisan to adopt and mix styles, motifs and techniques of the other culture with his own and modify them according to his own needs and aesthetic values. Despite the numerous influences the two art styles had from each other, their own unique characters remained intact. The Senmurv motif looks different when executed by a Byzantine artist in Constantinople than it does when executed by a Sasanian artist in Ctesiphon even though the lines of the motif itself are almost identical. The vine scroll drawn by a Byzantine looks different than that drawn by a Sasanian, although both derive from a common Hellenistic source.

Although it is clear that influence between Sasanian and Byzantine art occurred, it is very difficult to examine and bring indisputable proof of its existence, because of its variety not only in the art but also in the culture of the two realms, of their long and complex histories and of the scarcity of art objects surviving from the period.

Early Byzantine art and culture although it essentially remained Greco-Roman, nevertheless was much influenced by its most important Near Eastern neighbor, the Sasanian Empire. Near Eastern culture in general - including the Hellenistic too - with its sophistication and economic development, proved itself to be the vital power in the multi-ethnic Roman Empire and was able to survive for a thousand more years from the collapse of its Western part. The influence of Sasanian art in the Byzantine culture should be viewed as a part of the process that transformed the Roman Empire, shifted its political and economical interests to the East along with the move of its capital, and finally divided it into two separate parts.

More studies are being done recently on Hellenistic art and its influence and connection with the Near East. The development of such studies will soon provide modern scholars with better and firmer answers to the questions of influence between Early Byzantium and Sasanian Persia.

## Footnotes

- 1 We follow the dating system of the Byzantinologist Alexis Cavides, Ta chronia scematopeisis tou Byzantiou, (Athens, 1983)
- 2 Louise Marlow, "Sasanian History" in Dictionary of the Middle Ages, ed. Joseph R. Stayer, (New York, 1988), vol. V, p. 666.
- 3 Quoted in Richard Frye, The World Histories of Civilization, The Heritage of Persia (Cleveland, 1963), p.90.
- 4 Marlow, p. 667
- 5 Quoted in Prudence Oliver Harper, The Royal Hunter, Art of the Sasanian Empire (New York, 1978), p. 14.
- 6 Frye, p. 93.
- 7 J. B. Bury, The Constitution of the Late Roman Empire (Cambridge, 1910), p. 26.
- 8 Harper, p. 12.
- 9 Procopii Caesariensis Historiarum sui temporis Libri VII, (London, 1914), Vol. 5, p. 28.
- 10 John W. Barker, Justinian and the Later Roman Empire (Madison, 1966), p. 115.
- 11 Barker, p. 117.
- 12 Dean Arthur Miller, Studies in Byzantine Diplomacy, Sixth to Tenth Centuries (Thesis submitted to the Graduate school of Rutgers-The State University, New Brunswick, 1963 ), p. 190.
- 13 Bury, p. 19.
- 14 Harper, p. 17.
- 15 S.P. Brock, "Christians in the Sasanian Empire," Papers read at the 19th summer meeting and 20th winter meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society (Oxford, 1982), p. 7.
- 16 Brock, p. 1.
- 17 Information paraphrased from Brock, P. 3.
- 18 Brock, p. 3.
- 19 N. G. Garsoian, Armenia between Byzantium and the Sasanians (London, 1985), p. 126.
- 20 Thomas de Marga, The Book of Governors, E.A. Wallis Budge ed. et tr. (London, 1983), II, IV.
- 21 "Catholicos" is the corresponding title for "Metropolitan." It was mainly used as a title at the Patriarchate of Antiochea.
- 22 Brock, p. 9.
- 23 Agathias Scholasticus, De imperio et rebus gestis Iustiniani Imperatoris libri quinque. Ex bibliotheca et interpretatione bonaventurae Vulcanii cum notis eiusdem. (Parisiis, M.DC.LX.), p. 140.
- 24 Clement Huart, Ancient Persia and Iranian Civilization (New York, 1927), p. 145.
- 25 P. Kalligas, "Peri tis Byzantinis Avles," Dio Byzantinae Meletae (Athens, 1868), p. 8.
- 26 Prokopiou Illustriou Caesareos, Anecdota i Apocryphos Historia (Athens, 1973), p. 145.
- 27 Miller, p. 195.
- 28 Miller, pp. 193, 196, 202.
- 29 Elsie J. Holmes, Form and Decoration of Late Sasanian Textiles (New York, 1965), p. 2.
- 30 Harper, p. 119.
- 31 Holmes, p. 3.
- 32 Harper, p. 202.
- 33 Miller, p. 202.
- 34 Philis Ackerman, "Sasanian Jewelry," in Arthur Upham pe's . (Tokyo, 1938-77), p. 774.
- 35 Holmes, p. 34.
- 36 Holmes, p. 32.
- 37 Holmes, p. 40.
- 38 R. Browning, Justinian and Theodora (New York, 1971), p.
- 39 Ackerman, p. 775.
- 40 Getzel M. Cohen, The Seleucid Colonies, (Steiner, 1978),
- 41 Marlow, p. 666.

- 42 We find the same balance, order and clarity in most of the Sasanian silver plates depicting the King hunting. The animals killed by the King are always as many as those still depicted alive (plate 35).
- 43 Harper, p. 16.
- 44 Drawings have been taken from Elsie Holmes' dissertation: Form and Decoration of Late Sasanian Textiles, (New York, 1965)
- 45 Harper, p. 18.
- 46 Holmes, p. 68.
- 47 Holmes, p. 63.
- 48 Harper, p. 24.
- 49 After the Arab conquest of Persia, the Arabs incorporated many of the Sasanian traditions, literature and ceremonies into own culture. Later muslim Persian leaders, when composing story of Persia, used descriptions of Sasanian and other is rulers that are now lost. Arabic sources are not very relyable as to describing Sasanian customs, and they can be best described as documents of popular beliefs and traditions of times they were written.
- 50 I Hadiqa-i-Fasaht, Tarikh-i-Sasanyan (Calcutta, 1911 p.
- 51 Holmes, p. 32.
- 52 Bury, p. 10.
- 53 Bury, p. 9.
- 54 Ackerman, p. 775.
- 55 Ackerman, P. 774.

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