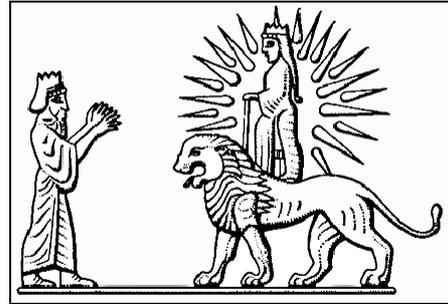


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“Commerce and Conflicts of Religions in Sasanian Iran between Social Identity and Political Ideology”

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COMMERCE AND CONFLICTS OF RELIGIONS IN SASANIAN IRAN BETWEEN SOCIAL IDENTITY AND POLITICAL IDEOLOGY

Antonio Panaino

In the present contribution I would like to tackle a problem strictly regarding the social ideology of the Mazdean culture that played a significant impact on the ethno-religious history of Pre-Islamic Iran. This problem concerns both the basic patterns of the social ideology developed by Zoroastrian priests and the politico-economic framework in which this tradition clashed with the Manichaeans.

It is well known that Sasanian Iran was a class society,¹ in some respects feudal,² having the king on the top of the social pyramid followed by the nobles (with a complex and well articulated hierarchy), the priests (who in their own turn had a special and powerful articulation), the warriors and then the farmers and shepherds. Besides the full-rate citizens they also had half-citizens (i.e. freeborn Iranians outside of their agnatic group and of their community or converted to other religions) and non-citizens like slaves,³ who were considered as a “thing” but in any case possessing some particular rights because of their human condition.⁴ I do not want to analyze this complex situation here but only the condition in which the tradesmen, who in some cases were also “citizens”, were considered according to the Sasanian ideology.

Sasanian economy and its social stability doubtless profited their basic income from agriculture and stock-raising and connected it with a strong social prestige. The king⁵ and the nobles had *latifundia*, but also the Church, and in particular the Fire Temples, possessed rich properties, slaves, animals, and, of course, they were allowed to receive offerings and gifts of many kinds. All these means

- 1 Christensen, 1944: 97-103, 518-526; Perikanian, 1983: 631-634.
- 2 See Christensen, 1944: 16-27, 103-129, 206-218, 258-259; Widengren, 1957a; 1967. It is useful to underline here that, according to Altheim - Stiehl (1954: 131-174), it is only with the tax reform of Xusraw I that the Sasanian feudal system began, because they assumed that only at that time the so-called *Grundherrenschaften* and their owners (*Grundherren*) were partly substituted with owners directly encharged by the king. Grignaschi (1971: 123) thought that a *stricto sensu* feudal component, according to the precise meaning attributed by Cahen (1950), can be seen in the Sasanian society; but Grignaschi, differently from Cahen, assumed that a feudal organization was not incompatible with a nomadic or semi-nomadic society. On the Aramaic origin of the Arabic term *ḥarāġ*, and in particular on its diffusion in Iranian languages, see Henning, 1935.
- 3 Perikanian, 1983: 634-640; Macuch; 1981: 79-84; many passages about slavery and slaves are attested in the *Mādayān ī Hazar Dādestān*, see Macuch, 1981 and 1993. Cf. also the very deep analysis offered by Colditz, 2000: 108-165 on the word *bandag*.
- 4 Perikanian, 1983: 636-634; on the special condition of the sacred slaves (*hierodouloi*), some of them belonging to nobility, see again Perikanian, 1983: 640-641. Cf. Colditz, 2000: 135-137.
- 5 Some scholars, like Løkkegaard (1950: 58) have assumed that all the land was formally considered as belonging to the State, but see the different opinion of Grignaschi, 1971: 126. Altheim maintained that only with Xusraw I the obsolete Achaemenid conception of the kingdom as the “house” of the king limited only by the properties (i.e. the other “houses”) of the great nobles, was finally superseded; on this problem see again Grignaschi, 1971: 120.

produced of course a significant income.⁶ Thus, we can say effortlessly that the earth represented the basic source of richness⁷ and that its possession was considered as a *status symbol* for nobles and priests. Under this respect both Iranian and Byzantine élites considered landed property as the unique source of richness worthy of a noble.⁸

Such a kind of cultural and ideological assumption was strongly based in Iran on a consistent number of religious ideas already attested in the Avestan literature and well developed in the Pahlavi texts. Not only the earth was considered like a goddess, more precisely it was associated with Spandarmad (Av. Spənta Ārmaiti),⁹ daughter and wife of Ohrmazd, but agriculture and stock-raising clearly represented the most respectful productive activities, as the so called “Georgic” chapter of the *Widēwdād*¹⁰ (i.e. the third *fargard* of this Avestan *nask*) shows. Among the first duties to be done according to the Mazdean Religion, a Pahlavi catechism declares: “my third (duty) is to cultivate and till the soil; my fourth to treat all livestock justly”.¹¹ [*sidīgar zamīg kišwzār kandan, warzīdan; čahārom gōspand dādīhā warzīdan*].¹² The wise Ādurbād, son of Mahraspand, recommends: “Till the earth and do good, for all men live and are nourished by the tilling of Spandarmad, the Earth”¹³ [*abar zamīg warz ud nēk kunēd čē har kas zīwišn <ud> parwarišn ī az warz ī spandarmad zamīg*].¹⁴ We could find a number of similar concepts expressed in Pahlavi literature that will simply confirm the existence of a *communis sed “pia” opinio*. This idea found a direct correspondence in the ideological scheme of the social hierarchy. According to the first chapter of the *Škand Gumānīg Wizār*, the “Religion” was like a mighty tree, of which “four off-branches are the four religious castes by which the Religion and secular life are (both) maintained, the priesthood, the warrior caste, the caste of husbandmen, and the caste of the artisans”¹⁵ [*čahār šāk čahār pēšagān ī dēn kē-š [dēn] gēhān patiš wirāyihēd, ī hast āsrōgīh, artēštārīh, wāstaryōšīh hu-tuxšīh*].¹⁶ “And in the microcosm, which is Man <four things> are seen to correspond to these four earthly castes, the head to priesthood, the hands to the warrior caste, the belly to the caste of husbandmen and the feet to the caste of artisan”¹⁷ [*ud andar gēhān ī kōdak ī hast mardōm, paydāgēnēd pad homānāgīh ī ēn čahār pēšagān ī gēhān, čiyōn abar*

6 Many temples were built as private pious foundations for the souls (*pad ruwān*) of the dead; see de Menasce, 1964; Perikanian, 1983: 661-665

7 See e.g. Løkkegaard (1950: 173) who underlines the most privileged condition of the tenants of fruit plantations.

8 See Carile, 1994: 50; 1996: 49.

9 Gray, 1929: 47-51, in particular 50.

10 Cannizzaro, 1913; 1916: 23-88.

11 Zaehner, 1956: 22.

12 Jamasp-Asana, 1913: 43

13 Zaehner, 1956: 115, par. 63.

14 Jamasp-Asana, 1913: 151.

15 Zaehner, 1956: 86, parr. 16-17.

16 See de Menasce, 1945: 24, 25.

17 Zaehner, 1956: 87, parr. 20-24.

sar āsrōgīh, abar dast artēštārīh, abar aškamb wāstaryōšīh, abar pay hutuxšīh].¹⁸

According to this scheme, of the four virtues indwelling man, i.e., temperance (*xēm*), fortitude (*hunar*), reason (*xrad*) and energy (*tuxšāgīh*), the “reason corresponds to the caste of husbandmen, for the function of reason is the tilling of the soil and the promotion of a continuous evolution towards the final Rehabilitation. Energy corresponds to the caste of artisans, for it is the greatest stimulant of their trade”¹⁹ [*abar wāstaryōšān xrad ī hast xradīh kārīh ī warzīdan ī gēhān paywastan ī ō frašgard. abar hu-tuxšān tuxšāgīh ī hast mahist rawāgēnīdārīh ī-šān pēšag*].²⁰

Although trade and caravans²¹ played an important role in the Sasanian economy, in particular on the international market between China and the West already from the Parthian period thanks to the Silk Road,²² the priestly ideology remained very conservative and maintained for a long period a very sceptical attitude towards tradesmen and their job. This position, reflecting a “political” view of the clergy, is patently expressed in a long passage of the *Dēnkard*, on which Molé²³ and Gnoli²⁴ have rightly attracted scholars’ attention:

Dēnkard, III, ch. 69:²⁵

*Abar mas *ud mayānag ud kas kār kār az nigēz ī weh dēn.*

(1) *hād andarōn ī weh dēn kār hamāg ān ī kirbag ud kirbag ān ī dahmīhā ud dahmīhā ān ī dām abzāyēnīdār ud mas kār ān ī druz wānīdārīhātar ud gēhān ī ahlāyīh freh-dahišnīhātar. (2) ān ī andar 4 pēšag ī dēn māzdēs: andar āsrōnīh pēšagān abardom yazišn ī yazadān čāšišnīh [ī] ud ōšmurišn ī dēn, wizīrīh ud dādwarīh kardan ud abārīg āsrōnīg. ud andar artēštārīh aswārān ud payādagīh ud abārīg artēštārīg. ud andar wāstaryōšīh pasušurunīh ud abārīg wāstaryōšīg. ud andar hu-tuxšīh nān pāk ud xwahlīgārīh <ud> abārīg hu-tuxšīg kār. (3) ud azēr āsrōnīg kār tā kārān frōd ud nidom andar abārīg 3 pēšag hamāg miyānag bawēd. ud frōd ud nidom ī kārān wāzāragānīh abdom kār ī andar wāstaryōšīh pēšag. (4) u-š andar xwēš sāmān ī azabar andar dahmīh ān ī azēr kastārīh paywand. ān ī-š azabar sāmān az ānōh kū padēxīh ud dārišn ī mardōmān gōspandān freh az ān ī mardōm pad gōspand-iz mānēnd abāyišnīg xrīnēnd abar dāštan ud wazēnīdan ī mardōm ud gōspand abāyišnīg padēxīh ud dārišn ō ānōh kū hambār ud bār ī-š andar kem ān ī pad padēxīh dārišn ī mardōmān gōspandān ī pad-iš mānišn hast abāyišnīg ānōh kū xrīnēnd rāst xrīnēnd ud ānōh kū frōxšēnd ud andar rāst frōxšēd. (5) ēd rāy čē*

18 See de Menasce, 1945: 24, 25.

19 Zaehner, 1956: 87, par. 28.

20 See de Menasce, 1945: 26, 27.

21 Fragner, 1990: 795-798.

22 Miller, 1969, *passim*. We cannot forget the importance of Sasanian trade in Northerneastern Russia, as shown by Frye, 1972.

23 Molé, 1963: 424-425.

24 Gnoli, 1989: 160, n. 37.

25 Madan: 59, l. 11, 61; Dresden, 1966: 43-44.

az-iš abzōn ayārīh ī gōspandān mardōmān ud abzāyēnīdan ī gēhān pad paywastan ī kār warzišn ī-šān ēg ō did kirrōg andar dahmīh ēdōn pad a-windišnīh az ān ī-š azabar gēhān mas sūddar pēšag kār ud nān ud wēš zahišnīh ī xwēš ud kēdādīg andar parwarišnīgīh dastwarīhā kunišnīh weh dēn dastwar. (6) u-š frōd nidom kārīh az-iz ēd ka az-iš ān-iz ī andar dahmīh parwand pad a-windišnīh ī nān ud weh zahišnīh az ān kār ī andar wāstaryōšīh ud āsrōnīg ud artēštārīh ud hu-tuxšīh dastwarīhā. ud sāmān ī-š ō adahmīh parwand xrīdan ud andar ham šahr pad padēxīh ud dārišn ī mardōmān gōspand garāntar ud garān wināhtar pad jōrdā xwāstan ī az-iš niyāz ud tangīh ī amaragān pad paywand u-š wēmār-iz ud sēj ī mardōmān ud gōspandān-iz tēx az zorēnīdan ī anēr pad zanišn ī ērān ēd rāy čē-š tangīh ī gēhān zanišn zyān ī ēr mardōm pad-iš az dahmīh bērōn ud ō kastārīh paywand dārēd tā pad garāntom wināhīh weh dēn <wi>zār.

“On the various works, the best, the intermediate and the lowest ones, according to the Good Religion.

(1) Then, in the framework of the Good Religion, all the works are meritorious deeds, and meritorious deeds are those piously done, and piously done are those (works) increasing the creation. The supreme activity is that mostly overcoming the *druz* and mostly developing the world of rightness. (2) These (workers) are (visible) in the four classes of the Mazdean Religion:²⁶ in the priesthood, highest class, the worship of the gods, the teaching and the study of the religion, the application of judgement and justice and the other priestly deeds. In the warriorhood, riding, marching and the other military deeds. In the husbandry, the breeding and the other agricultural activities. In the artisan class, the bread cooking and the preparation of the food and the other activities of the artisans. (3) Under the priestly work down till the lowest and least of activities all the works in the other three classes are “intermediate”. And the lowest and least of the works is trade, the last work among those in the class of husbandry. (4) And in its superior limit it belongs to the pious works, (but) for its inferior limit to iniquity. Its superior limit (is based on the condition that), from there where there are more things than necessary to the prosperity and the preservation of human and animal beings, (these) things necessary to the prosperity and the preservation of human and animal beings which are bought, removed and transported there where the storehouses and the banks (shores) that, there, are inside, remain fewer than what is necessary for assuring the prosperity and the preservation of men and animals. There where purchase is done, purchase is done honestly; there where sale is done, sale is done honestly. (5) And because such an activity supports prosperity of animals and men and increases the world by linking their actions each other, the artisan lies within the limits of pious activities (only when he is) in the impossibility of finding out an activity — among these staying above — that is more advantageous for the world in order to gain his own bread and subsistence and which the Good Religion authorizes as a legal means of survival. (6) (But) this

26 See also the *Letter of Tansar*; cf. Boyce, 1968: 37-38.

is the lowest and least activity, also when, although it is placed within the limits of pious activities, it is legal in the impossibility of gaining its bread and subsistence in the exercise of another agricultural, priestly, warrior and artisanal activity. Its limit with unpious activities lies when in the same country, where there is prosperity of things indispensable for the comfort and entertainment of men and animals, there is a pretension for grain of prices higher (than right) and with a great sin. From this (derive) misery and countless distress and consequently illness and troubles to men and animals, enforcing then the sharp edge of the Anērān with the striking of the Iranians. This (happens) because the narrowness of the world and the damages striking the Iranians are outside of (religious) pity and are connected with iniquity and also with the worst sins declared by the Good Religion".²⁷

From this passage we deduce not only that trade was considered "the lowest and least" among the legal professions permitted by the Mazdean Religion, but that although its positive effects were somehow recognized (importation and exportation of goods necessary to human and animal life), some heavy prejudices infected its role. The final paragraph of chapter 69 of the third book of the *Dēnkard* in fact underlines the dangers of that profession: in particular the dishonesty of commerce and the pretension of earning more than its due imposing higher prices. The only example given in the passage quoted above strictly refers to the grain; this probably means that the tradesmen were suspected of illegal gain with respect to the husbandmen who actually did the basic job for the sustenance of the land and for the production of richness. The text doubtless tries to show that commerce and trade are dangerous activities from the religious point of view because their exercise was too close to robbery. In this framework the worst aspects of trades were considered as an inner support to the enemies of Ērān. It is also interesting to note that "misery and countless distress and consequently illness and troubles to men and animals" were considered as effects of bad, illegal, and of course immoral trade, while there is no mention of any problems directly connected to the production of grain and other means of sustenance.

It is clear that the priestly ideology states that the sacred activity of agriculture does not imply *in se* any immorality; furthermore we do not find any mention of the unequal division or distribution of the properties or of the income coming from the agricultural work, but the responsibility is attributed to the final distribution of grain etc., i.e. to the market. This conclusion doubtless reflects an ideological prejudice more than the economic interests of the landlords and of the great owners of cultivate lands, who were the social pillars of the Zoroastrian culture; in fact, the latifundia produced a surplus that was necessarily sold out. It is clear that these bold suspects against the tradesmen correspond also to a number of conflicts between the rich landlords, who considered commerce a socially low and vulgar activity, and an important class or social group of tradesmen, who in any case had an important economic role in Sasanian Iran and were organized in

27 See also the translations by Molé, 1963: 424-425, and of de Menasce, 1973: 75-76.

associations or companies.²⁸ In fact we cannot believe that commercial activities were a minor item in the economy of Pre-Islamic Iran, and that the merchants, some of them probably very rich, who were involved in these trades, did not contribute to the development of the Sasanian central and provincial treasures with the taxes they paid. We cannot forget that the Sasanian customs barrier was a significant instrument of power but that the Sasanians did not exercise any kind of blind and autocratic economy. In the third article (κατὰ τρίτην τάξιν) of the treaty of the peace negotiated after the Lazic war²⁹ by Peter the Master of Offices, as delegate of Justinian,³⁰ and Zik Yazdgušnasp, as delegate of Xusraw I,³¹ in 562, it was established that both Roman and Sasanian tradesmen were allowed to import and export their goods, but that all these stocks had to pass through the Persian customs offices. According to article four,³² it was also established that official representatives and commercial letters might freely use the foreign post system³³ and that all the goods might be imported and exported without paying any custom duty.³⁴ Although this liberalization of the market was compensated through an annual payment³⁵ of 30.000 golden pieces (τριακόντα χιλιάδας ἑτησίας χρυσίου νομίσματος)³⁶ or — as some sources attest³⁷ — of 500

28 See Pigulevskaja, 1963: 178-181.

29 Frye, 1983: 327; Bury, 1929, 2: 113-123. Very important is the analysis of this treaty offered by Winter, 1987: 67-72.

30 We may recall that it was Ernst Stein (1919: 140; 1920: 82-87) who assumed the influence of a Sasanian model on the *thema*-constitution developed under Heraclius, but already based on some administrative reforms carried through by Justinian, while Darkó (1937: 135-147) assumed a common “Turanian” background. See in particular Løkkegaard, 1950: 65.

31 See apud Menander Protector (Bekker - Niebuhr, 1829: 360; Müller, 1851: 212). See also the new edition with English translation offered by Blockley, 1985: 70-71. Cf. Güterbock, 1906: 57-105; Bury, 1929, 2: 121-123.

32 See apud Menander Protector (Bekker - Niebuhr, 1829: 360; Müller, 1851: 212; Blockley, 1985: 70-71). Cf. Güterbock, 1906: 57-60; Bury, 1958: 121-123; Dodgeon - Lieu, 2002: 132.

33 About the existence of a Sasanian post system see Løkkegaard, 1950: 159; Dodgeon - Lieu, 2002: 132.

34 See Christensen, 1944: 125.

35 As Carile remarks (1994: 54; 1996: 47, 54), this amount was given to the Sasanians in compensation of the economical damage suffered after the transfer of Lazica, and consequently of the unique Persian access to the Black Sea, to Byzantium. See also Iluk, 1985.

36 See apud Menander Protector (Bekker - Niebuhr, 1829: 352; Müller, 1851: 208-209; Blockley, 1985: 70-61). As Güterbock (1906: 63-65) already suggested, the fact that Menander mentions only 30.000 *nomismata* cannot be explained as a mistake, but with the probable assumption that he was referring to an older golden issue (i.e. the *aureus* of Diocletian), that was 1/60 and not 1/72 of *libra*. See also Carile, *ibidem*. Güterbock (*ibidem*) insists on the fact that the reference to 30.000 ... νομίσματος (and not νομίσματα) is given to a unity of measure of account and not to the coin itself. See also Dodgeon - Lieu, 2002: 131-132.

37 See Johannes Eriphaniensis: χρυσίου λίτρας πεντακοσίας ἔφ' αἷς ἔμπροσθην γεγόνασιν αἱ σπονδαί (Müller, 1851, F.H.G. 4, 274) “500 pounds of gold which the agreement established before”; Theophylactus Simocatta, 3, 9: ἀν' ἔτος ἕκαστον πεντακοσίας λίτρας χρυσίου — ἄς Ἰουστινιανὸς βασιλεὺς ταῖς συνθήκαις διωμολόγησεν “the annual payment of 500 pounds of gold, which the emperor Justinian had conceded in the agreement” (tr. of M. and M. Whitby, 1997: 86); Theophanes, 245: ἀνὰ

golden *librae*, that is to say about 36.000 *nomismata*, to the Sasanian crown by Byzantium, it shows that Xusraw probably tried to support a better circulation of goods and stocks, and that in any case this activity was among his main political interests. But this deep attention for markets and trades was not a later trend in Sasanian politics; we may in fact recall another fitting example emerging from the peace settlement between Diocletian and Narsēs (298 or 299 AD) according to the version of Petrus Patricius.³⁸ Narsēs actually accepted all conditions imposed by the Romans but strongly protested against the point of the agreement imposing that only “the city of Nisibis, which lies on the Tigris, should be the place for transactions” (εἶναι δὲ τόπον τῶν συναλλαγμάτων Νίσιβιν τὴν πόλιν παρακειμένην τῷ Τίγριδι).³⁹

The Sasanian care in controlling the commercial roads doubtless confirms the political attention of the crown to the income resulting from import/export exchanges with foreign countries” as their strenuous attempts preventing any direct trade between Centro-Asiatic peoples and Byzantium.⁴⁰ On the Western border,⁴¹ Byzantium and the Sasanian Empire were continuously in conflict⁴² not simply for “spiritual” reasons, but because of the direct domination of the commercial roads, both by earth and by sea, e.g. in Caucasus and in the Transcaucasian area, but also in Syria, Egypt and Arabia.⁴³ The presence of various important sources (gold, silver, copper, rock-crystal, rare pearls etc.), confirmed also by Chinese travellers,⁴⁴ but also the exportation towards China and the East of carpets and *fard*, precious stones and valuable cloths, corals and other fine and expensive goods, no doubt show that the artisans’ works and the related trades played a first level role in Sasanian economy.⁴⁵ In addition the partial control⁴⁶ of the silk trade and the Iranian production of silk products from imported Chinese silk allowed Sasanians to be leaders of the exportations towards the West, where they tried to impose a kind of *μονοπώλιον*⁴⁷ imposing high prices this enormous income decreases a lot only after the 6th century A.D. when the Byzantines became able to develop an

ἔτος πεντακοσίους λίτρας χρυσοῦ “500 pounds of gold for year”. Cf. Dodgeon - Lieu, 2002: 131-134.

38 Petrus Patricius, fragment 14 (Müller, *FHG* IV, 1851: 189); see also Dodgeon - Lieu, 1991: 133. Cf. also Winter, 1987 and Winter - Dignas, 2001: 205-207. Cf. also the later regulations established in 408/9 A.D.; see also *Cod. Iust.* IV 63, 4. I have to thank Prof. J. Wiesehöfer for this kind information.

39 See in particular the detailed discussion of this treaty offered by Winter, 1987: 47-58.

40 Cf. also Carile, 1994: 50-56. About espionage on the border and trades activities see Lee, 1993.

41 See Millar, 1993.

42 See Dodgeon - Lieu, 1991.

43 Pigulevskaja, 1969: *passim*; Miller, 1969. See Carile, 1994: 50-52; 1996: 48-49 with more details and other bibliography.

44 See in particular Beal, 1885, II: 277-278.

45 Christensen, 1944: 126.

46 We shall recall that the Sogdians preserved their independence and that they controlled the most eastern part of the Silk Road; see Haussig, 1983: 169-171; Frye, 1983: 351-355.

47 See, on the contrary for the Byzantine reaction, Pigulevskaja, 1969: 85 and *passim*.

autonomous production of silk.⁴⁸ Shipping trades also were another important item in Sasanian economy already since the times of Ardaxšīr;⁴⁹ Sasanian ships were significantly present in many Oriental seas and their activities were in ruthless competition — as already remarked — with the Roman trades.⁵⁰ Thus the Islamic conquest of Sasanian Iran found a developed society, where the process of urbanisation with its markets and bazaars was very significant.⁵¹

In addition to all these facts we shall underline that a *wāzārbed* (Parth. *wāžarbed*; Gr. ἀγορανόμος), i.e. “the chief of the bazaar”, a kind of administrative officer, was considered worthy to be mentioned in the trilingual inscription of Šābuhr I at the Ka‘ba ī Zardošt,⁵² although he appears in a low position of the list.⁵³

These data confirm the idea that the contempt attested in Pahlavi texts also in later times after the Arab invasion did not represent the political and economic interests of the crown as actually reflected in Sasanian politics. It was just a conservative ideological position, based on ancient patterns and on an ideal model of society, even if not directly corresponding to that attested in Avestan texts, very archaic and obsolete. The overwhelming impact played by the market society in Sasanian Iran through the multi-ethnic role played by Jews⁵⁴ and Christians, whose activity continued also during the Arab domination,⁵⁵ probably emphasized this ideological prejudice by the Zoroastrian priestly class, whose nationalism⁵⁶ conditioned some moments of Iran history. We shall just briefly mention the importance of these controversial trends in Sasanian society during the first century of the Manichaean history, where the clerical Mazdean persecution against Mani and his followers found its most seminal field, not only in the new and weak king, Wahrām I, but more significantly in the noble landlords. The Zoroastrian religion in fact considered agriculture, as we have seen, one of the most sacred activities, while for the Manichaeans it was a kind of sin, a sort of violence against the earth; thus, the progressive diffusion of Manichaeism represented, as Gnoli has rightly underlined,⁵⁷ a concrete danger for the pillars of Sasanian feudal power and economic sources of income, while it is not peculiar if such a religion was very successful among tradesmen.⁵⁸ Such a dangerous doctrine was well understood by

48 Christensen, 1944: 128.

49 Christensen, 1944: 128.

50 Reinaud, 1863: 267-268.

51 See Lombard, 1971: 140-149; Pigulevskaja, 1963: 158-194. Cf. also the catalogue of the provincial capitals of the Ērānšahr which the Pahlavi text *Šahrāstānīhā ī Ērān* dealt with (Marquart, 1931).

52 See Huyse, 1999, I: 62; II: 176-177; cf. Christensen, 1944: 129.

53 We have to remark the existence of a *wāstaryōšān-sālār* or *wāstaryōš-bed*, “the chief of the poll tax”, well known from Arabic sources; see Christensen, 1944: 122-123 and *passim*.

54 See Widengren, 1957; 1960; 1961; Neusner, 1983; 1986.

55 See Lombard, 1971: 223-253.

56 See Gnoli, 1989: 156; cf. also Gnoli, 1984.

57 See Gnoli, 1984: 43 and 1989: 160, who mentions, quoting Theodor bar Qōnī (“merchandise of calm and peace”; see Cumont, 1908: 77; Jackson, 1932: 230, n. 2), the positive and metaphorical meaning attributed in Manichaean scripts to the “merchandise”.

58 See Adam, 1961: 118-119.

Zoroastrians who expressly mention it, e.g., in the *Dēnkard*, III, 200,⁵⁹ where among the twelve advices of the Sasanian wise man, Ādurbād ī Mahraspāndān, the sixth one states:

... *ēk padīrag ān ī ahlāyīh-ārāstār ādurbād az a-dādīhā kuštan ī gāwān ud gōspandān pahrēz handarz[ēnīd], druz xastag mānī pad gēhān a-warzišnīh dawistan dārišn ī hamist mardōm ānāftan gōspand abāg mardōm abēsī-hēnīdan dawist.*⁶⁰

“Contrary to that which the restorer of righteousness, Ādurbād, declared (namely) the abstention from unlawful killing of cattle and small cattle, the crippled demon Mānī in his clamouring about non-agriculture in the world, in his rejecting of the maintenance of mankind as a whole, clamoured that the small cattle should be destroyed together with mankind”.⁶¹

It is unnecessary to recall that these accusations do not explain the basic reasons of the Manichaean program of purification of the light imprisoned in the earth, in the matter and then in the darkness, but from the opposite and antagonist Zoroastrian point of view they can give an idea of what the Sasanian clergy thought of Manichaeism. Apropos of this situation, Gnoli has rightly noted how this — in some respect — archaic and conservative society, although full of many contradictions⁶² (that will later explode in the antagonism between the most important landlords and the little noble landowners [*dehgān*]),⁶³ should have been scandalized and shocked by these new and subversive teachings. On the contrary, for a person like Mani, of Iranian origin, but educated in the Mesopotamian area, where the urban economy was very rich and developed, these ideas appeared quite sound.⁶⁴ But while the different socio-cultural background of the first Manichaeans did not produce a real and crude turmoil in the Sasanian society, the heavy economical situation exploded after seven years of drought and famine during the kingdom of Pērōz and the severe conditions imposed by the Hephthalites determined new politico-religious trends (generally connected with the Mazda-

59 Madan, 216; Dresden, 1966: 170, ll. 4-7. Text according to Olsson, 1991: 279.

60 For a more detailed analysis of the passage see de Menasce, 1945: 231. I follow here the translation given by Olsson, 1991: 282.

61 See also the translation of de Menasce, 1973: 219-220.

62 Gnoli (1984: 43) assumes that in the late Parthian period the economic and political situation knew an evolution comparable to that attested in the *colonatus* of the Roman Empire (with reference to Mazza, 1973: 205-216; 1979: 460-474).

63 Their condition knew a sensible improvement when, after Xusraw's reform, they were, as Frye (1984: 326) writes, “paid and equipped by central government”. This way they directly depended upon royal authority and not upon the great nobles, whose fidelity to the crown was not so sure, as already remarked by Pigulevskaja (1937). According to Altheim - Stiehl (1954: 46-50), the tax reform of Xusraw should have reduced the economical power of the noble landlords, bringing to the royal treasury a higher and direct income.

64 Gnoli, 1984: 44.

kites),⁶⁵ which stirred up and shackled the Iranian world. Although the precise origin of Mazdak's doctrine, if deriving either from Mazdeism or Manichaeism, has been disputed,⁶⁶ in any case it reversed the basic patterns of social inequality, imposing a sort of apparently crude "communism", aiming at the distribution of landed properties and of women. Mazdakism, which, I think, was a Zoroastrian heresy, probably with Gnostic (also thus only *lato sensu* connected with Manichaeism) and Kabbalistic elements,⁶⁷ clearly represented a revolt against the great feudal and noble lords with a certain support by the peasants,⁶⁸ whose conditions were probably very poor.⁶⁹ But the strong repression of that movement by Xusraw I did not correspond to a restoration; the new king introduced in fact a radical tax reform with some military and administrative innovations, that, although some of its aspects still raise problems and a complex debate⁷⁰ (in particular as regard its possible relations with the tax reform introduced by Diocletian),⁷¹ re-establishing more equity and giving the *dehgān* new privileges and put them under the direct authority of the crown.⁷²

But the political effects of these social proto-revolutionary movements were felt also in Byzantium. As Carile remarks,⁷³ following and improving a suggestion advanced by Jarry,⁷⁴ the circumstance that the *praefectus* Erythrios and another *patricius* named Ateneos suggested to Justinian, during the *bellum persicum*, to adopt Mazdakism,⁷⁵ in order to conquer Asia, has to be seriously taken into consid-

65 We have of course to take into consideration the fitting distinction proposed by Patricia Crone (1991) between the first kingdom of Kawād I, whose politics does not seem to have been directly determined by Mazdak, and the second one, when the role of Mazdak was boldly effective.

66 While Christensen (1925) assumed that Mazdak was a Manichaeism, Altheim (1961: 61-80; 1963; cf. also Altheim - Stiehl, 1954: 189-206) underlined his Zoroastrian origin, but with a strong emphasis on a Greek Neo-Platonic influence; other supportive elements of the Zoroastrian background of Mazdakism have been offered by Molé (1961; 1962: 188-206) and more recently by Shaki, 1970; 1985; we may also recall two very important monographic contributions offered by Klíma (1957; 1977) that deal particularly with the socio-political aspects of Mazdakism; see also Pigulevskaja, 1963: 195-230. For the impact of Mazdakism on some sects of the Islamic period see in particular Sadighi (1938) and Yarshater (1983).

67 See more recently Shaked, 1994: 125-131 and Gnoli (forthcoming). Very important is the historical reconstruction of the facts offered by Crone, 1991, who rightly distinguished between a first period in which it was only king Kawād who imposed some economic and social reforms, in particular against the nobles and their harems, while only in a second period, after the king's reconquest of power, Mazdak would have led the social protests.

68 Frye, 1983: 322-333.

69 On the existence in the Sasanian period of a poor class of farm workers, socially weak and practically deprived of personal freedom, see Løkkegaard, 1950: 172-174.

70 For a very deep reflection on the scholarly discussion in the light of the Arabic sources, see in particular Grignaschi, 1971. Cf. also Løkkegaard (1950) and Dennett (1950: 14-16).

71 This hypothesis has been advanced by Pigulevskaja, 1937 and, with a different framework by Altheim - Stiehl, 1957: 35-53. Against it see Hahn, 1959. Cf. also Grignaschi, 1971.

72 See Frye, 1983: 325-326.

73 1994: 50; 1996: 49-50.

74 See Jarry, 1968: 335-337. Cf. also Carile 1978: 59-60.

75 The source for this episode is represented by John bishop of Nikiu (VII century), who makes references in his *Chronicle* (see Zotenberg, 1833: 389-390) to the speech of Addaeus and

eration. In fact it could mean that some Byzantine élites understood that a change in the social hierarchy, with a more influential support to commerce and tradesmen, generally snobbed also by the Western aristocracies, might open the way for a social and cultural unification of East and West. It has to be underlined the interesting circumstance, noted by Pigulevskaja,⁷⁶ Altheim⁷⁷ and also by Grignaschi,⁷⁸ that Kawād's politics, who heavily damaged the highest noble families when he was supporting the Mazdakite movement,⁷⁹ played a direct impact on the restarting of foundation of royal cities to which some administrative provinces were directly annexed. These data confirm the complexity of the economical history of the Sasanian Empire and show some of the inner contradictions opposing the interests of the greatest nobles and those of the *dehgān*, as well as the rich landlords and tradesmen. Thus, it seems that the Church and the crown that should have been theoretically in agreement, did not always share the same perspective, and certainly in the last period of the Sasanian empire their evaluation of the urban economy and of the market system was not ideologically coincident. In fact, although in some cases Sasanian politics and clergy ideology agreed, as in the case of the persecution against the Manichaeans, the social doctrine of the Mazdean Church, in particular its scorn for tradesmen and their works, did neither limit the commercial activities nor it stopped royal supports for tradesmen, as is confirmed by some crucial events of Iranian history and also by the great monetary circulation,⁸⁰ generally in silver, developed in Sasanian Iran. The anti-tradesmen prejudice remained limited to a religious and conservative bias,⁸¹ that the priests preserved, at least in their religious books, for some centuries after the collapse of the Empire.

But this "traditional" attitude changed under the compelling impact of the Zoroastrian emigration towards India, where the new Parsi community flourished in areas where commercial activities probably existed already since the Sasanian period. In these new foreign lands Zoroastrians found their fortune as artisans and tradesmen, being the property of latifundia very difficult for them there. In this context that had, completely changed with respect to that of their original homeland, Parsis insisted on the natural reliability stemming from the basic "*dogmata*" of their religion: "good thoughts", "good words" and "good deeds". This simple *credo*

Aetherius with the Byzantine Emperor; both nobles were related by Johannes to the doctrine of a certain Masedes, who cannot be nobody else but Mazdak. Erythrios' antagonism towards the administrative politics of the emperor Zeno has been discussed by Jarry (1968: 242-244); we can also recall that Erythrios' wife (cf. also Ioan. Malalas, p. 423) was condemned to death as Manichaean after the edict of year 527. The penetration of Manichaean doctrines in Byzantium is confirmed by Michael Syriacus (ed. Chabod, 2, p. 191). See again Jarry, 1968: 343 and the considerations by Carile, 1978: 54-61.

76 Pigulevskaja, 1937; 1963: 209-218. Cf. already Bartol'd, 1923: 56-57.

77 Altheim in Altheim - Stiehl, 1954: 189-206; 1957: 31-35.

78 Grignaschi, 1971: 121.

79 A probable relation between the Mazdakite revolt, interpreted as a peasant protest and Xusraw's reform, has been suggested by Pigulevskaja, 1963: 195-230.

80 Lombard, 1971: 119-136. About the Silk Road see now Alram, 2002: 40-44.

81 See Boyce, 1970.

was presented as a good witness, like a sort of patent or guarantee of their own honesty in trades and affairs and no discredit was socially attributed to the main new source of income. A new homeland imposed a new scale of values.

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