Sasanian Empire (224–651 CE)

Successors of the Achaemenids

224 CE    Ardashir I
- a descendant of Sasan
  - gave his name to the new Sasanian dynasty,
- defeated the Parthians
- The Sasanians saw themselves as the successors of the Achaemenid Persians.
Shapur I (r. 241–72 CE)

- One of the most energetic and able Sasanian rulers
- The central government was strengthened
- The coinage was reformed
- Zoroastrianism was made the state religion
- The expansion of Sasanian power in the west brought conflict with Rome

Shapur I the Conqueror

- Conquers Bactria and Kushan in east
- Led several campaigns against Rome in west
- Penetrating deep into Eastern-Roman territory
- Conquered Antiochia (253 or 256)
- Defeated the Roman emperors:
  - Gordian III (238–244)
  - Philip the Arab (244–249)
  - Valerian (253–260)
    - 259 Valerian taken into captivity after the Battle of Edessa
    - Disgrace for the Romans
- Shapur I celebrated his victory by carving the impressive rock reliefs in Naqsh-e Rostam.

Rome defeated in battle

Relief of Shapur I at Naqsh-e Rostam, showing the two defeated Roman Emperors, Valerian and Philip the Arab
Terry Jones, *Barbarians* (BBC 2006)  
clip 1=9:00 to end  clip 2 start -  

- [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t_WqUbpRChU&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t_WqUbpRChU&feature=related)  
- [http://www.youtube.com/watch?NR=1&feature=endscreen&v=QxS6V3lc6vM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?NR=1&feature=endscreen&v=QxS6V3lc6vM)

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**Shapur I Religiously Tolerant**

Intensive development plans  
- founded many cities, some settled in part by Roman emigrants.  
  - included Christians who could exercise their faith freely under Sasanian rule  
- Shapur I particularly favored Manichaeism  
  - He protected Mani and sent many Manichaean missionaries abroad  
- Shapur I befriends Babylonian rabbi Shmuel  
  - This friendship was advantageous for the Jewish community and gave them a respite from the oppressive laws enacted against them.

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**Shapur II**  
(309–379 CE)

May have been the only king in history to be crowned in uterus  
- crown was placed on his mother’s belly  
- child, named Shapur, was born king  
- During his youth the empire was controlled by his mother and the nobles  
- Upon Shapur II’s coming of age, he assumed power  
  - quickly proved to be an active and effective ruler.
**Sasanian Conquests Continue**

- first led his small but disciplined army south against the Arabs
  - defeated and secured southern areas of the empire
- campaign against Romans with early success
  - conquests were halted by nomadic raids that threatened control of the Silk Road
  - Shapur II's military forces were not sufficient to hold the territory he had taken in the west
  - Sign a peace treaty with Constantius II (353–361)
    * both sides agreed not to attack each other's territory for a limited period of time.

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**2nd Sasanian Second Golden Era (498–622)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>502</td>
<td>Sasanians take Theodosiopolis (Erzurum) in Armenia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>503</td>
<td>take Amida (Diarbekr) on the Tigris</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>505</td>
<td>an invasion of Armenia by the western Huns from the Caucasus led to an armistice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Romans paid subsidies to the Persians for the maintenance of the fortifications on the Caucasus</td>
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<tr>
<td>525</td>
<td>Sasanian suppress revolts in Lazica and recapture Georgia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>His army with aid of Lakhmids defeat Byzantine army under command of famed Belisarius</td>
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- Kavadh I succeeds in restoring order in the interior and fought with success against the Romans
  - founded several cities, some of which were named after him
  - regulate taxation

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Plate with a hunting scene from the tale of Bahram Gur and Azadeh, 5th century, Sasanian
The king as bowman/hunter

- becomes a standard motif on royal Sasanian silver plates during the reign of Shapur II (309–79)
- theme symbolized the invincibility and the prowess of Sasanian rulers and dominated
- royal plates, which may have been used as gifts to neighboring courts
- The king has various royal attributes: a crown and fillet, covered globe, nimbus with beaded border, and beaded chest halter with fluttering ribbons.

Iranian epic the *Shahnama*

*Book of Kings*, by Firdausi in late 10th/early 11th C.
- tale of the Sasanian king Bahram V (r. 420–38)
  - was challenged to feats of archery
  - Bahram "Gur" (Wild Ass) shot an arrow that removed the horns of a male gazelle
  - transforming his appearance into that of a female, and shot two arrows into the head of a female gazelle
- The story became a favorite theme in the arts of Islam but was unknown on works of Sasanian date until the appearance of this gilt-silver plate.

Sasanian Silver Plates

- The identity of the Sasanian king on this plate is uncertain
- crown identifies him as either:
  - Peroz (r. 459–84)
  - Kavad I (r. 488–97, 499–531)
Often were decorated with female figures holding a variety of festal objects.

- Motifs attest to the continuing influence of Greek imagery associated with the wine god Dionysus.
  - Has been suggested that these figures have been adapted to the cult of the Iranian goddess Anahita.

Late Sasanian silver vessels

Byzantine Wars with Sasanians

531 Kavadh I dies
- Belisarius repels Persians

532-40 Byzantine Emperor Justinian makes "Eternal Peace" with Sasanians
- Pulls all troops out of the East
- Needs men to invade the West

Byzantine Emperor Justinian (482-565)

531

532

534

535

536

550

554
### Emperor Maurice (582-602)

- Military strategist
- First emperor to take the field since Theodosius I
- Creates the *Exarchates* of Ravenna and Carthage
  - Combined civil and military authority
  - Probably lead to the Theme system later
- Author of *Strategikon*:
  - Practical guide for military operations

### Revolt of “Emperor” Phokas (602)

**Phokas**
- Mid-level army officer foments revolt
  - Leads troops back to Constantinople
    - Claiming to put Maurice’s son on the throne
  - Has Maurice and 6 sons all executed
  - Becomes emperor
    - First successful coup d'état in Constantinople.

### Sassanian King Khusrou II

- Friend of Maurice
  - Excuse he needs to invade Byzantine territory
- Byzantines depose Phokas
  - Byzantine general Heraclius makes desperate attempt save the Byzantine Empire
  - Sassanians take most of the East
  - Besiege Constantinople
  - Then Heraclius attacks while Persian troops at Constantinople
Sasanian Expansion

- **610**
  - hostilities resume: Sasanians win:

- **612**
  - Battle of Cilician gates

- **613**
  - Apamea, Antioch, Edessa fall
  - Herakleios meets with Simon Stylite

- **614**
  - Siege of Jerusalem
  - 50,000 killed; 35,000 enslaved
    - Relics taken to Ctesiphon
      - True Lance, Holy Cross, Holy Sponge

- **616**
  - Egypt
  - no more grain dole

- **617**
  - Chalcedon

Byzantine Counteroffensive of Herakleios

- Byzantines regained
  - all lost territories
  - captured soldiers
  - war indemnity
  - the True Cross and other relics taken from Jerusalem in 614

Peace Treaty
Consequences of Byzantine-Persian War

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