Ērānšahr in Transition: West and Central Asia Between the Sasanians and Islam, 600-750 CE

Convened and Organised by: Khodadad Rezakhani

A Conference at Princeton University, 10 & 11 May 2019

Julis Romo Rabinowitz Building – 399
Introduction

Periods of transition, from a historical point of view, are curious stretches of time when a society and its institutions do not fit into orderly categories to which historians commonly assign them. Often, the lack of a clear political control, or a discernible pecking order decided by a dominant ideology, leads historians to posit these periods as those of breakdown, disintegration, collapse, and chaos.

Perhaps a most iconic example of such treatment has been the ‘End of the Western Roman Empire’ paradigm and the origin narratives it has provided for many medieval entities. Yet, the paradigm of “late antiquity” during the past half a century has been a strong force in viewing even that momentous event in a completely different light.

Still, the ‘collapse’ of the Sasanian Empire and the rise of the Islamic one appears to be the narratives that continues dominating the discourse on the events of the seventh and eighth centuries in West and Central Asia, demarcating social, political, economic, legal, and even linguistic periods. Commonly put in terms of ‘failure’ (of the Sasanian system) and ‘success’ (of the Islamic one), this framing presumes processes and elements ranging from a theocratic oligarchic rule to divine grace for conquering forces.

The present gathering, taking advantage of a great company of scholars who have devoted their research to different aspects of the history of this period, aims to delve deeper into the study of the period of transition between the Sasanian and Islamic rules. By studying institutions and processes outside the usual models of collapse and conquest, it is hoped that the engagement of these institutions with change – rather than their ‘reactions’ to them – can be better observed and communicated. The success of such a gathering will, hopefully, help in finding new ways of studying the transition period and thinking about what preceded and followed it.

Khodadad Rezakhani

1 May 2019 AD

Princeton, NJ, USA
10:00-10:30: Registration and Coffee

10:30: **Welcome Address by Prof. Michael Cook**, *Professor of Near Eastern Studies* and the *Interim Director* of the Sharmin and Bijan Mossavar-Rahmani Center for Iran and Persian Gulf Studies

**Panel I: 10:45-12:30**

**Chair: James Howard-Johnston (Oxford)**

Simcha Gross (UCI): *A History of a Dark Age: Babylonian Jews between the Sasanians and Early Islam*

Scott McDonough (William Patterson): *An Undivided Loyalty: Christians and the State in the Last Sasanian Century, 550–651 CE*

Ani Honarchian (UCLA): *Covenant with Gods before War: Yazdgerd II and his Christian Soldiers*

**12:30-13:30: Lunch (Served at the conference location)**

**Panel II: 13:30-15:00**

**Chair: P. Oktor Skjaervo (Harvard)**
Stephen Rapp (Sam Houston): From Chosroids to Bagratids: Georgia and Georgians in a Changing World, ca. 580-813

Alison Vacca (UTK): Jīuanšēr and the End of Sasanian Rule in the Caucasus

Touraj Daryaee (UCI): Mazdak and Driyōšān: The Holy Men of Late Antique Iran

15:00-15:15: Coffee Break I

Panel III: 15:15-16:15

Chair: Nicola di Cosmo (IAS)

Khodadad Rezakhani (Princeton): The Trial of Khosrow II Aparvez and the End of the Sasanian Rule

Yuri Stoyanov (SOAS): ’The Religio-Political Dimensions of the Sasanian Occupation of Jerusalem (614-628) – New Reappraisals and Perspectives’

16:15-16:30: Coffee Break II

The Graduate Student Panel: 16:30-17:30

Chair: Alison Vacca (UTK)

Yaara Perlman (Princeton): Shuraḥbīl ibn Ḥasana’s Relation to the Khazraj

Thomas Benfey (Princeton): The Medical Tradition of Greater Khuzestān under Sasanian and Islamic Rule

Aleksander Engeskaug (SOAS): Zoroastrian Fire Temple Estates, the Islamic Conquest, and Market-Oriented Agriculture in the Age of Transition

19:00: Dinner (for presenters and invited guests only)
Saturday, May 11, 2019

Panel IV: 10:30-12:15
Chair: Michael Bates (ANS)
Judith Lerner (ISAW, NYU): Transitions in the Visual Culture of Iranshahr
Stuart Sears (Independent): Sacral Kingship and the Origin of the Muslim Declaration of Faith (al-Shahâda)
Joel Walker (UW): The Dragon and the Pearl: Pathways of a Motif in Late Antique Eurasia

12:15: 13:30: Lunch (Served at the Conference Location)

Panel V: 13:30-15:00
Chair: Michael Cook (Princeton)
Robert Hoyland (ISAW): Arabs under the Sasanian Rule
János Jany (Budapest): Legal Transition in Iran and Central Asia in late Antiquity and Early Middle Ages

15:00- 15:15: Coffee Break III

Panel VI: 15:15-16:30
Chair: Peter Golden (Rutgers)
Kevin van Bladel (Yale): Iranian Languages of Post-Sasanian Iran
Robert Haug (U. Cincinnati): *The Mawla Who Needed a Translator: Conquest and mobility in an Imperial Borderland*

16:30-17:00: Coffee Break IV

17:00-18:00, *Keynote Lecture and Conclusion*

James Howard-Johnston (University of Oxford): *The Coming of the Arabs to Iran*

19:00-21:00: Banquet Dinner (for presenters and invited guests only)