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## The Three Hephthalite Wars of Peroz 474/5-484

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**Abstract:** *The first aim of this study is to reconstruct the main features of Peroz's Hephthalite wars and their military significance for Persia. Secondly, it seeks to analyze the combat doctrine and tactics used by Peroz. Thirdly, the study aims to show what lessons the Persians drew from his defeat and how this affected the Persian combat doctrine. This article demonstrates how the reckless behaviour of Peroz resulted in military, political and economic disasters which undid the achievements of the previous generations. This analysis shows how his disastrous policies led to the abandonment of the reforms of the Bahram V Gur and caused the adoption of one-sided combat doctrine.*

**Key words:** Sasanian Warfare, Military History, Sasanian Army, Late Antiquity, Archery, Iran, Peroz, Hephthalites

### The aim of the study

This study seeks to analyze the main features of Peroz's Hephthalite wars in 474/5-484 and their influence on the Persian military doctrine after his death. In other words, the study traces the next stages of development in the Persian combat doctrine after the reforms of Bahram V Gur which is analyzed in Syväanne, *The Reign of Bahrām V Gōr: The Revitalization of the Empire through Mounted Archery*.<sup>1</sup>

This article will demonstrate how the reckless behaviour of Peroz resulted in the adoption of one-sided combat doctrine which overemphasized the importance of shower archery and orderly combat and orderly methodological pursuit at the expense of all other tactical systems and variations – this is the combat system which is so familiar to us from Procopius and the military treatise *Strategikon*. The article will also re-date many of the events while re-assessing the evidence.

The principal sources for the reign of Peroz belong to four different historical traditions: The Greco-Roman; Christian chronicles; Iranian via later Muslim sources; and Armenian. In addition to these, there exist some archaeological, artistic and numismatic evidence, but unfortunately these are of limited value for this study. None of the narrative sources gives us the full picture, but fortunately for us these still provide complementary accounts which enable us to fill in the blanks and to make

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<sup>1</sup> SYVÄNNE, 2015.

the occasional cross-check on the sources and evidence. A fuller discussion of this can be found in the relevant parts of the study.

### **The Background for the Hephthalite Wars of Peroz**

The beginning of the reign of Peroz was difficult. The sources in Iranian tradition suggest that the *šāhān-šāh* Yazdgerd II (399-420) thought that only two of his sons Peroz (Pirouz) and Hormizd had what it took to be rulers. According to Tha'alibi,<sup>2</sup> Yazdgerd left the decision of who would succeed him to the great men of the state and to the principal *marzbans*. When Yazdgerd then died in 457, the two sons gathered their supporters and started a bitter civil war, but it was Hormizd who got the throne first with the help of the Persian magnates. Peroz sought help from the Hephthalites who then provided him with the necessary military assistance for him to gain the throne in 459. This help came with a price. Peroz was forced to hand over territory to them.

The beginning of the reign of Peroz was quite inauspicious as it saw the beginning of the seven year draught in 459-466 that resulted in unprecedented hardship for the people of Iran.<sup>3</sup> The eastern sources are unanimous in their praise of how Peroz handled this crisis, but the Christian and Jewish ones are not quite as favourable because Peroz and the magi found a suitable scapegoat for the troubles in Christians and Jews – the only foreign religious group that was not subjected to persecution were the Nestorians who found favour because of their opposition to the Christians supported by the East Romans.

There were also several wars that shadowed the beginning of Peroz's reign. The Albanian Christians revolted against him possibly because of the persecution of Christians, but it was crushed with Hunnish help of in about 463/4. Peroz also inherited problematic relationship with the Kidarites from his father and brother. The situation persisted because Peroz was unable to pay them the customary tribute with the result that he was forced to fight against the Kidarites from ca. 462 onwards. On top of that, the Saraguri Huns invaded Persia in about 465/6 – they may have acted as proxies for the Romans. However, Peroz was up to the challenge and decisively defeated the Kidarites by early 468. It is probable that the Hephthalites had acted as allies of Peroz in this war because we find them in possession of Bactria (the area around Balkh/Bactra) and it is likely that the capital of the Kidarites, Balaam is the city of Balkh.<sup>4</sup> Peroz was therefore free to turn his attention against the Romans who had repeatedly refused to contribute any money or men to his wars.

The victory over the Kidarites gave Peroz the chance to turn his eyes towards west where he had repeatedly demanded money from the Romans for the upkeep of

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<sup>2</sup> Tha'alibi, 573-579.

<sup>3</sup> There have lately been many comments which claim that the latest droughts in the area would have been the result of climate change. When analysing such events one should keep in mind that the current draught is not the first one in the area and that the climate is not stable but changes constantly and always will do so.

<sup>4</sup> After this the Hephthalites appear to have continued the war against the Kidarites independently from the Persians because the last Kidarite envoy from Gandhara arrived in China in 477. This means that the Persians just declared victory in 468 and then left the rest of the war in Hephthalite hands.

the garrison at Derbend.<sup>5</sup> His demands met with no success as long as the Roman Emperor Leo (457-474) was alive, but the situation changed drastically when Zeno (474/5-491) became Emperor in early 474. Zeno faced multiple problems of his own so that he appears to have decided that it was better to finance Persian military campaigns against the Hephthalite Huns rather than fight against them. It is because of this that we find Eusebius as Zeno's personal representative in the court of Peroz during Peroz's first Hephthalite campaign in about 474/5-476. In sum, up to this moment Peroz had been very successful in all of his ventures and he had lived up to his name 'Victorious' (= Peroz). He had first dealt with the economic problems caused by the draught and he had then successfully defeated the Kidarites after which he had managed to extort from the Romans enough money to finance his next endeavour which was to turn against his helpers and allies the Hephthalites.

### **The First Hephthalite War in about 474/5**

Yeshu' the Stylite's claim<sup>6</sup> that Peroz fought three wars against the Hephthalite Huns has been quite needlessly suspected. Some modern historians claim that the first two of those describe the wars he fought against the Kidarites while some other historians<sup>7</sup> claim that he fought only two campaigns against the Hephthalites. However, when one combines his information with the texts of Procopius, Theophanes, Ṭabarī and Tha'alibi it becomes quite obvious that the details provided by these support the existence of three separate wars against the Hephthalites as claimed by Yeshu'. Therefore, I agree with Kurbanov<sup>8</sup> and Farrokh<sup>9</sup> that there were indeed three campaigns against the Hephthalites as claimed by Yeshu' the Stylite. One can in fact use military analysis of the texts of Theophanes,<sup>10</sup> Procopius,<sup>11</sup> Tha'alibi,<sup>12</sup> Ṭabarī,<sup>13</sup> and Bal'ami<sup>14</sup> to support the version given by Yeshu'.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> MAKSYMUK, 2016.

<sup>6</sup> Yeshu' the Stylite, 9-11.

<sup>7</sup> E.g. SAUER et al., 2013: 596. In other words, I do not agree with BLOCKLEY (1992, 83, 215 n.29) and others who suggest only one capture. The reason for the readiness of the Hephthalites to let Peroz ransom himself twice would have been to allow the return of an incompetent military leader to take charge of the enemy affairs. One should place more trust in the veracity of the sources especially when the details of these clearly independent sources correspond with each other.

<sup>8</sup> KURBANOV, 2010: 165-170.

<sup>9</sup> FARROKH, 2017: 206-209.

<sup>10</sup> Theophanes, (AM 5967-8.

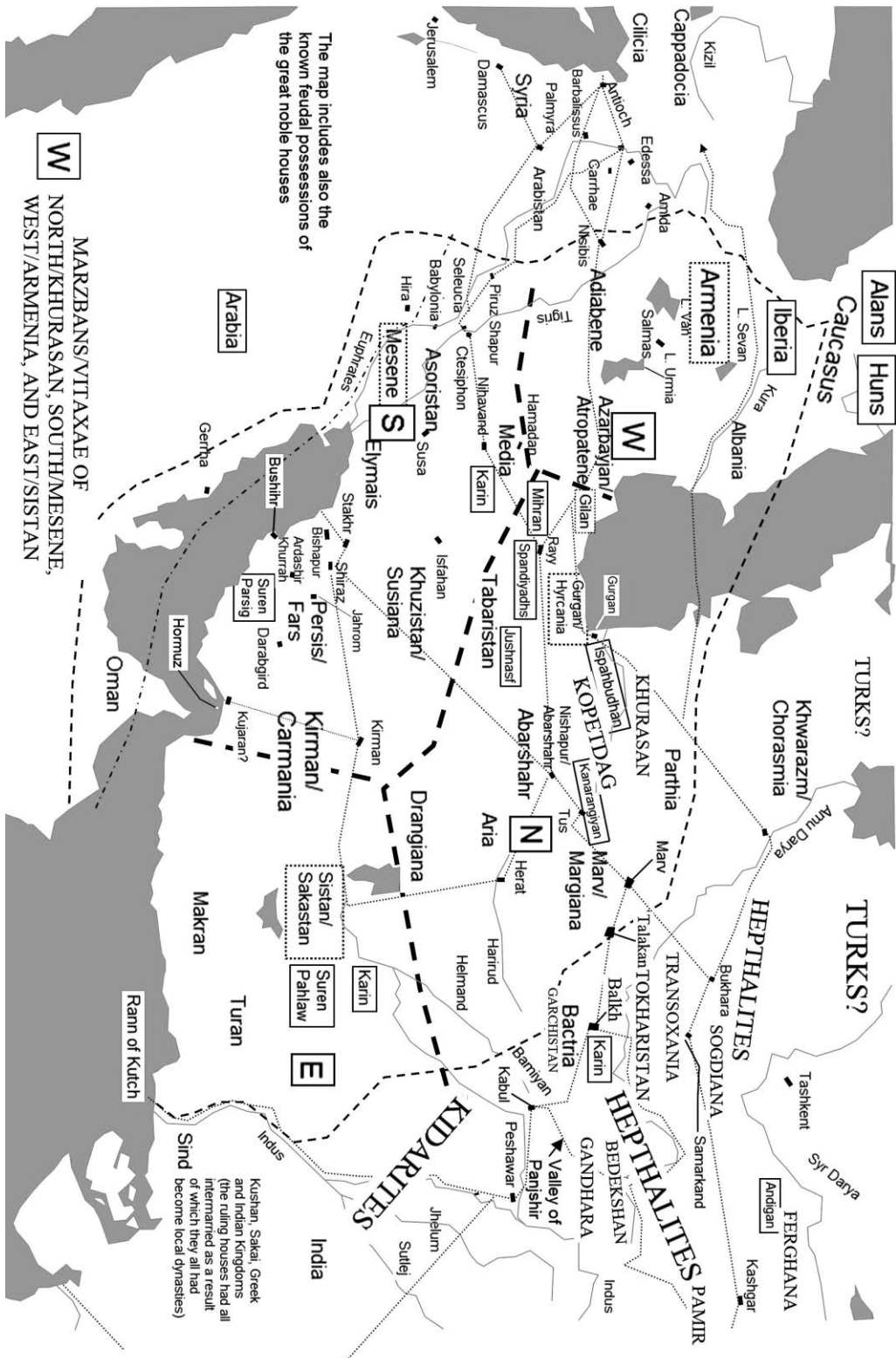
<sup>11</sup> Procopius, I 3.1-4.35.

<sup>12</sup> Tha'alibi, 579.

<sup>13</sup> Ṭabarī, 873-80.

<sup>14</sup> Bal'ami, 131-142, esp.140-141.

<sup>15</sup> See also my arguments in SYVÄNNE, 2020: 115-6.



The map includes also the known feudal possessions of the great noble houses

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MARZBANS/VITAXAE OF NORTH/KHURASAN, SOUTH/MESENE, WEST/ARMENIA, AND EAST/SISTAN

Kushan, Sakai, Greek and Indian Kingdoms (the ruling houses had all intermingled as a result of which they all had become local dynasties)

We do not know why Peroz turned against his former benefactors the Hephthalites in about 474/5.<sup>16</sup> According to the account of Ṭabarī, which was based on Hisham,<sup>17</sup> Peroz himself stated that he had to start a war against the Hephthalites when they had taken possession of Tukharistan because he could not leave these lands in their hands on the grounds that the Hephthalites practised sodomy. This is clearly just an excuse for war. It is very likely that Tukharistan had been handed over to the Hephthalites as a reward for their alliance against the Kidarites and that Peroz's intention had just been to betray his allies at the first opportunity he got which came after his victory over the Kidarites and the financial backing of the Romans. After this, Ṭabarī includes the information regarding Peroz's last war with the Hephthalites, but it is clear that this results only from the condensing of information either by Ṭabarī or his source Hisham.

On the basis of Bal'ami,<sup>18</sup> Kurbanov<sup>19</sup> states that Peroz had 50,000 men on this first campaign, but this is a mistake because Bal'ami and Ṭabarī both describe

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<sup>16</sup> The war has usually been dated roughly to the year 474/5, but the nature of the sources is such that it would be possible to date this war also to the year 475/6. However, I have here accepted the former dating as the likeliest. There is no reason to accept the account provided by Zachariah of Mitylene (7.3) according to which it was the Huns (Hephthalites) who initiated the hostilities as seems to be accepted by SAUER et al. (2013: 597). All other accounts which are also more accurate in their details and which are independent of each other (Roman, Armenian, Iranian) prove otherwise. According to Zachariah's version, the "Huns" invaded when Peroz was ruling in the 13<sup>th</sup> year of the reign of Anastasius (491-518, i.e. in 504) through the gates guarded by the Persians and through the mountains so that they invaded Persia proper. Peroz then gathered an army and went to meet them and enquired why they had attacked. They stated that they lived by their weapons, the bow and sword, and the Romans had promised through their ambassador (Eustace the merchant from Apamea, i.e. a spy in disguise) to pay twice the money the Persians paid as tribute, if they would wage war against the Persians. Peroz then promised to pay them the same money even if his army outnumbered the enemy, but at the same time he planned to betray his promises. The 400 leading Huns together with Eustace met Peroz and Peroz promised to hand over the tribute to the 400 Huns who would stay there on the mountain while the rest of the Huns would retreat back to their country. On the tenth day Peroz then broke his oath and prepared for war. Eustace advised the Huns to fight despite being outnumbered with the result that they defeated and killed Peroz together with a large part of his army, after which they pillaged at their will and returned back to their country. The body of Peroz was never found and he received the nickname of liar. As is clear Zachariah has confused reigns and events with each other. However, there are some possible ways to salvage something out of this mess. Firstly, if we assume that the 13<sup>th</sup> year meant the reign of Leo (457-474), then this Hunnic invasion would have taken roughly at the time when the Romans and Persians appear to have fought a war and which ended in Persian defeat in 469 (SYVÄNNE, 2020: 79-80). This would definitely explain why the Persians would have abandoned their war against East Rome which had started so well with the capture of Amida in 469. Secondly, it is possible that Zachariah has confused the reigns of Peroz and Kavadh with each other so that the Romans would have actually paid the Hephthalites to invade Persian territory in 504 (the date given) which would naturally have led to the peace negotiations in 505-506. The advantage of this version is that it fits the dating and the circumstances prevailing under Kavadh. Kavadh had started his war against the Romans because he owed the Hephthalites tribute money and when he had failed to take the money from the Romans through diplomacy he resorted to war. There were even Hephthalites in his army at least in the initial stages. In these circumstances it is easy to see how the Romans could have bribed the Hephthalites – Kavadh had not paid them the money he owed them. Furthermore, Procopius (I 7.1-2) specifically refers to Roman efforts to disturb the relationship between these two. In my opinion, the latter alternative is therefore likelier even if the former is also possible. See also the arguments in SYVÄNNE, 2020: 115-6, 207.

<sup>17</sup> Ṭabarī, 873.

<sup>18</sup> Bal'ami, 133-134.

the second and third of the wars and not the first one at all. In short, we do not know what the size of the army was that Peroz took with him to the first campaign. My own educated guess is that it was larger than on the second occasion because in the second campaign Peroz marched through a desert and would probably not have taken as many men as on the other occasions. My educated guess is that the army was now also smaller than on the third campaign because in that case Peroz made every effort to take as large an army as possible. Consequently, my best educated guess is that he had perhaps about 70,000-80,000 men plus the infantry and non-combatants on this occasion.

The first account of Ṭabarī which is based on some other source than Hisham gives us then the important details missing from Hisham,<sup>20</sup> which is also confirmed by Tha'alibi,<sup>21</sup> Bal'ami,<sup>22</sup> Dinawari,<sup>23</sup> Hamza<sup>24</sup> and *Nihāyat al-'irab*.<sup>25</sup> This account proves that before embarking on his war against the Hephthalites, Peroz founded three towns which actually appear to have been founded for the purpose of supporting both defensive and expeditionary military campaigns. The cities/towns founded by Peroz were Rām Fayrūz near the city of Rayy, Rūshan Fayrūz between Gurgan and the Gate of Sūl and the third one Shahrām Fayrūz in the region of Azerbaijan. Rām Fayrūz and Rūshan Fayrūz were clearly intended to serve as logistical hubs and assembly points for soldiers for armies operating in Gurgan and from Gurgan to east and north-east of it against the Hephthalites, while Rūshan Fayrūz was meant to serve as a logistical hub and assembly point for armies defending Armenia and the passes of the Caucasus. These new cities provided both defensive depth and assembly points for Persian offensives into the neighbouring countries. The building of these was probably undertaken during the years 470-473 in preparation for the future campaigns. It is very likely that the defences of the Gurgan Wall were also strengthened at the same time<sup>26</sup>. After this, Ṭabarī provides an account of what is actually the second war because its details correspond with the second war mentioned by Yeshu' the Stylite.

The first of Peroz's campaign is actually described by three East Roman sources Yeshu' the Stylite, Procopius and Theophanes, but not at all by Tha'alibi, Ṭabarī or Bal'ami.<sup>27</sup> Procopius describes two campaigns, one in which Peroz was accompanied by a Roman envoy and another which can be dated to the year 483/4. The first of these is clearly the first campaign mentioned by Yeshu' the Stylite. Theophanes also describes two campaigns for Peroz, the first of which he claims took

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<sup>19</sup> KURBANOV (2010: 165) reconstructs the actual war correctly by stating that this was the invasion described by Procopius, but for some reason takes the figure of 50,000 men from the second campaign described by Bal'ami (166).

<sup>20</sup> Ṭabarī, 873-876.

<sup>21</sup> Tha'alibi, 578.

<sup>22</sup> Bal'ami, 131.

<sup>23</sup> Dīnawarī (Fayrūz).

<sup>24</sup> Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī, 69.

<sup>25</sup> *Nihāyat al-'irab*, 224.

<sup>26</sup> For a fuller analysis of the problems relating to the dating of the walls, the building of which were definitely started before the reign of Peroz and continued to be strengthened after him, see SAUER et al., 2013: esp. 593ff.

<sup>27</sup> KURBANOV (2010: 165) also notes that the first campaign of Procopius should be placed to have taken place at this time.

place in about 474/5 and the second and last one in about 475/6. It is clear that Theophanes has condensed the account because the last campaign of Peroz took place actually in 483-484. The first of the campaigns with feigned flights etc. is clearly the same as the one described by Procopius and it is also clearly the same as the first version given by Yeshu' the Stylite. I will give first the version provided by Procopius because it is the most detailed and was also probably the source used by Theophanes possibly directly or via some other later source. I will then complete its information with the information provided by Yeshu' the Stylite.

According to Procopius<sup>28</sup>:

“At a later date the Persian king Perozes [Peroz] became involved in a war concerning boundaries with the nation of the Ephthalitae Huns, who are called White Huns, gathered an imposing army, and marched against them. The Ephthalitae are of the stock of the Huns in fact as well as in name; however they do not mingle with any of the Huns known to us; for they occupy a land neither adjoining nor even very near to them; but their territory lies immediately to the north of Persia; indeed their city called Gorgo, is located against the Persian frontier, and is consequently the centre of frequent contests concerning boundary lines... for they [Hephthalites] are not nomads like the other Hunnic peoples, but for a long period have been established in goodly land... They are the only ones among the Huns who have white bodies and countenances which are not ugly. It is also true that their manner of living is unlike that of their kinsmen, nor do they live a savage life as they do; but they are ruled by one king, and since they possess a lawful constitution, they observe right and justice in their dealings both with one another and with their neighbours in no degree less than the Romans and Persians.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, the wealthy citizens are in the habit of attaching to themselves friends to the number of twenty or more, as the case may be, and these become permanently their banquet-companions and have a share in all their property, enjoying some kind of common right in this matter.<sup>30</sup> Then, when the man who had gathered such a company together comes to die, it is the custom that all these men be borne alive into the tomb with him.<sup>31</sup>

Perozes marching against these Ephthalitae, was accompanied by an ambassador, Eusebius by name, who, as it happened, had been sent to his court by the Emperor Zeno. Now the Ephthalitae made it appear to their enemy that they had turned to flight ... they retired with all speed to a place which was shut on every side by precipitous mountains, and abundantly screened by a close forest of wide-spreading trees. Now as one advanced between the mountains to

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<sup>28</sup> Procopius, I 3.1-22, tr. by Dewing, 13-21.

<sup>29</sup> i.e. they followed the ‘international law’ of the kind that was in existence at the time and expected that their neighbours like the Persians would also follow their agreements to the letter like they the Hephthalites did.

<sup>30</sup> had these customs influenced the Communist ideology of the Mazdakite movement?

<sup>31</sup> this custom was even more demanding that it was among the retinues of the Germanic nobles or among the bucellarii of Rome and was probably one of the reasons why the Hephthalites were prepared to sacrifice their lives for their ruler; See the next campaign.

a great distance, a broad way appeared in the valley, ... but at the end it had no outlet at all, but terminated in the very midst of the circle of mountains.<sup>32</sup> So Perozes, with no thought at all of treachery, and forgetting that he was marching in a hostile country, continued the pursuit without the least of caution. A small body of Huns were in flight before him, while the greater part of their force, by concealing themselves in the rough country, got in the rear of the hostile army ... When the Medes began realize all this ... though they refrained from speaking of the situation themselves through fear of Perozes, yet they earnestly entreated Eusebius to urge upon the king, who was ignorant of his own plight, that they should counsel rather than make an untimely display of daring, ... so he went before Perozes ... When Perozes heard this ... He therefore advanced no further. By this time the Huns were following without any concealment, and were guarding the entrance of the place. ... Then at last the Persians saw clearly in what straits they were ... Then the king of the Ephthalitae sent some of his followers to Perozes ... the Huns would grant them deliverance, if Perozes should consent to prostrate himself before him as having proved their master, and, taking the oaths ... should give pledges that they would never again take the field against the nation of the Ephthalitae. When Perozes heard this, he held a consultation with the Magi... The Magi replied that, as to the oath, he should settle the matter according to his own pleasure; as for the rest, however, he should circumvent his enemy by craft. They reminded him that it was the custom among the Persians to prostrate themselves before the rising sun each day; he should, therefore, watch the time closely and meet the leader of the Ephthalitae at dawn, and then turning toward the rising sun, make obeisance. In this way, they explained, he would be able in the future to escape the ignominy of the deed. Perozes accordingly gave the pledges concerning the peace, and prostrated himself before his foe exactly as the Magi had suggested, and so, with the whole Median army intact, gladly retired homeward.<sup>33</sup>

It is quite obvious that this war is the first war of Yeshu' in which the Persian army was not destroyed and in which Peroz was ransomed by Roman money. According to Yeshu' the Stylite,<sup>34</sup> in the first war the Persian king of kings Peroz was initially (presumably in about 474/6) successful against the Huns<sup>35</sup> but was then taken prisoner by them. When Zeno then heard of this, he sent money to the Hephthalites and ransomed the king and reconciled the two parties. A part of the deal was the promise

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<sup>32</sup> FARROKH (2017: 395, n.80) suggests a location in Kopetdag Mountains while SAUER et al. (2013: 597) suggests Alburz mountains; Sauer (et al.)'s suggestion is definitely incorrect because the war took place in Hephthalite territory, but Kopetdag is possible, but in my opinion it is likelier that the location is actually much further to the east because the Hephthalites performed strategic feigned flight.

<sup>33</sup> This account shows how childish the Magi and Peroz were. It is ridiculous to claim that Peroz would not have shown his obedience towards the Hephthalite ruler when he did so in the morning. The Hephthalites had humiliated the Persians and their ruler full stop and no amount of I kept my fingers crossed would make that go away. It is no wonder that Peroz fared so poorly in his wars against the Hephthalites.

<sup>34</sup> Yeshu' the Stylite, 9-10.

<sup>35</sup> Yeshu' the Stylite states that Peroz fought against the Chionites, which in this case clearly means the Hephthalites.



by Peroz that he would henceforth respect the border and not invade the Hephthalite territories. I would suggest that a part of the deal was the payment of tribute to the Hephthalites by Peroz and that this tribute was paid by the Romans as suggested by Yeshu'. The personal role of the emperor Zeno is uncertain because Eusebius was already on the spot and could have acted in his name by using the money that he had brought to the east to support the Persians. I would in fact suggest that Eusebius did indeed that and that Zeno probably did not initially have any active role in this matter until later when he probably agreed to pay the yearly tribute on behalf of the Persians. The reason for Zeno's readiness to continue the payments would obviously have been that after the first war the Persian army was still largely intact and could have been used against the Romans in a situation in which Zeno faced other problems closer at home.

However, there is the problem of the letter of Sidonius (dated to 476),<sup>36</sup> which states that it was actually the Persian *šāhān-šāh* who paid tribute to the East Romans in return for peace and not the other way around. There are two possible explanations for this. Firstly, it is possible that Sidonius was just unaware that the policy had changed under Zeno. Secondly, it is possible that Zeno changed his policy after he had ransomed the Persians in 475/6 and exploited the troubles of Peroz and required the paying of tribute in return for peace because he knew that Peroz was in trouble in 475. The ransom money could have been seen as a loan to the Persians, which the Persians were required to pay back, hence the claim of the Persians paying tribute to the Romans. The problem with the latter alternative is that Peroz's army was still intact after the first war in 475/6 and it would have required "balls" from Zeno to stop the payments in this case and he was a man who was not known for his personal bravery.<sup>37</sup> In short, I would suggest that Zeno continued the payments until the next war as implied by Yeshu' the Stylite's text.

The second of the Hephthalite campaigns can be dated to have taken place in about 478-479<sup>38</sup> on the basis of the information provided by Balami.<sup>39</sup> According to him, Peroz started to plan the third war against the Hephthalites (dated 473-474) after three or four years after the second war and that the preparations for the war lasted for a year. On the basis of Lazar Parpeci's text<sup>40</sup> we know that the preparations for the third war must have started in about 482 because Peroz recalled Mihran and his forces from Persarmenia in February 483 to participate the campaign that began in 483 and ended in 484. This places the second campaign roughly to the period 478-479.

### **The Second Hephthalite War in about 478-479**

The only source to give the reason for the second war is Bal'ami.<sup>41</sup> According to him, there were a great number of subjects of the Hephthalite King Khoushnewaz<sup>42</sup> who were dissatisfied with his tyrannical rule with the result that they fled to

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<sup>36</sup> Sidonius. *Letter to Lambridius*, 8.9.

<sup>37</sup> See e.g. Malchus, frgs. 5, 18.3.42ff.

<sup>38</sup> KURBANOV (2010:166-167) dates this war to the year 476/7, but in my opinion this is too early.

<sup>39</sup> Bal'ami, 137-138.

<sup>40</sup> Ghazar P'arpets'i', 273-277.

<sup>41</sup> Bal'ami, 131-132.

<sup>42</sup> Akhshunwar of Ṭabarī (874-80) and Mas' udi (97).

the Persian side of the border where Peroz duly granted them a place of asylum. Peroz dispatched two envoys to Khoushnewaz with the message that the Hephthalite refugees had implored his assistance so that he now demanded that Khoushnewaz would mend his ways or face the prospect of an invading Persian army. When four years had passed and the number of refugees from the Hephthalite Kingdom at the Persian court had increased to a great number, Peroz finally assembled an army and declared war against the Hephthalites with the excuse that Khoushnewaz had not mended his ways. It was the presence of these dissatisfied Hephthalite refugees in the Persian court that undoubtedly encouraged Peroz to take the gamble. He must have thought that the Hephthalite Kingdom was internally divided and ripe for the taking, but in this he miscalculated badly. The Hephthalite King had still enough loyal subjects to resist the Persians. When the Persian army arrived close to the territory of Balkh, where the desert of Merv separated the Hephthalites from the Persians, the king of the Hephthalites assembled his generals, and it was then that he was advised by one of his generals to resort to a ruse, which is described below.

This second Hephthalite war of Peroz is described by Tha'alibi,<sup>43</sup> Ṭabarī,<sup>44</sup> Bal'ami<sup>45</sup> and Yeshu' the Stylite,<sup>46</sup> but not by Procopius or Theophanes. The description of this campaign is basically the same in Tha'alibi (only a summary), Ṭabarī<sup>47</sup> and Bal'ami (the most detailed)<sup>48</sup> and it is for this reason that I have included below Bosworth's translation of Ṭabarī<sup>49</sup> into which I add information in the footnotes from Bal'ami<sup>50</sup> who gives the most detailed account of the campaign together with my own comments and additions.

“... he [Peroz] set off with his army for Khurasan, with the aim of making war on Akhshunwar,<sup>51</sup> king of the Hephthalites. When news of this reached Akhshunwar, he was stricken with terror. It is mentioned that one of Akhshunwar's retainers offered up his life for him<sup>52</sup> and told him, “Cut off my hands and feet and hurl me down in Fayruz's [Peroz] way; but look after my children and family.” ... When Fayruz passed by him, he was distressed at the man's state, and asked him what had happened to him.<sup>53</sup> The man informed him that Akhshunwar had done that to him because he had told Akhshunwar that he would be unable to stand up against the Persian troops ... The man told

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<sup>43</sup> Tha'alibi, 578.

<sup>44</sup> Ṭabarī, 874ff.

<sup>45</sup> Bal'ami, 129ff.

<sup>46</sup> Yeshu' the Stylite, 10.

<sup>47</sup> Ṭabarī, 874-875.

<sup>48</sup> Bal'ami, 131-137.

<sup>49</sup> Ṭabarī, 113-115.

<sup>50</sup> As far as I know there does not exist any English translation of this text, which is the reason why I have here quoted Ṭabarī into which I have added material from Bal'ami.

<sup>51</sup> Khoushnewaz in Bal'ami.

<sup>52</sup> This is indeed an example of the Hephthalite devotion to the ruler and fatherland and presumably an example of the devotion of the retainers previously described by Procopius; According to Bal'ami (132) the man was prepared to do this on behalf of his family because he was already an old man.

<sup>53</sup> According to Bal'ami (133) the Persians recognized the man because he was a great and famous general of Khoushnewaz.

Fayruz, ..., that he would show him and his followers a shortcut,<sup>54</sup> ... Fayruz was taken by this trickery, and he and his troops set off along the route the mutilated man had told him about.<sup>55</sup> They kept on floundering through one desert after another, and whenever they complained of thirst, the man would tell them that they were near water and had almost crossed the desert.<sup>56</sup> Finally, when the man had brought them to a place where, he knew, they could neither go forward nor back, he revealed to them what he had done. Fayruz's retainers said to him, «We warned you about this man, O King, but you would not be warned. Now we can only go forward until we encounter the enemy, whatever the circumstances may be.»<sup>57</sup> So they pressed ever onward, thirst killed the greater part of them, and Fayruz went on with the survivors against the enemy. When they contemplated the state to which they had been reduced, they appealed to Akhsunwar for a peace agreement.<sup>58</sup>

According to the Persians sources, the Hephthalite ruler allowed Peroz and his men to return back to their own lands in return for a promise confirmed by an oath never to invade Hephthalite territory again and to establish a boundary between the two kingdoms which the Persians would never cross. Peroz then confirmed these with a written document which was sealed and confirmed in the presence of professional witnesses. The marker on the border was a column, which Peroz and his followers built in the course of six months during which they were apparently prisoners of the Hephthalite ruler. The sources appear to have sometimes confused this newly built column with the column previously built under Bahram V Gur. On the basis of Bal'ami's account it is clear that these were separate columns and that the column of Peroz was built when he was still a prisoner and quite apparently in a different locale. It is quite clear that the Persians were now forced to concede territory to the Hephthalites and that the new column was placed to mark the new border. Modern research has suggested that the area conceded to the Hephthalites consisted of Merv

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<sup>54</sup> According to Bal'ami (133), the man stated that the two armies were separated by a distance of 20 days and that this distance would enable the Hephthalite ruler to collect a large army to oppose the Persians, but he promised to show Peroz a shortcut through the desert which would take only five days to traverse, which would then enable Peroz to engage the enemies before they would have been able to collect all of their forces.

<sup>55</sup> According to Bal'ami (133-135), Peroz then ordered the Persians to take with them water and food to last for five to six days. His subordinates protested against this and stated that he should not trust the man because it was dangerous to travel through the desert, but to no avail. The army which accompanied Peroz into the desert consisted of 50,000 men. My suggestion is that Peroz did not take all of his men with him because the idea was to march through the desert quickly and surprise the enemy so that the 50,000 men represent only the elite portion of the Persian force.

<sup>56</sup> According to Bal'ami (134), the Persians protested on days five, six and seven and the situation stayed the same until 15 days had passed and all the water had been consumed and men and horses had started to die. It was then that Peroz finally accepted that he had been fooled.

<sup>57</sup> According to Bal'ami (134-135), men died on every stop during the marching that took place during the days 15 to 20. On the 20th day of the march Peroz assembled the men to ask for their advice. Their only advice was to march forward.

<sup>58</sup> According to Bal'ami (135), the Persians reached the cultivated land, the frontier of the Kingdom of Khoushnawaz, on the 23rd day, after which they rested for three days and advised the ruler to beg for peace because they were already in practise prisoners of Khoushnawaz. The king agreed. Of the 50,000 soldiers that had begun the journey only 1,000 men were left. The rest had succumbed to the thirst.

and its surroundings. Similarly modern research has suggested that it was after this defeat that Peroz introduced a third type of coins, which was also copied by the Hephthalites, but these studies place the war to have taken place in about 476/7.<sup>59</sup>

On the basis of Yeshu' the Stylite's account,<sup>60</sup> it is clear that the Persian sources quite purposefully hide some of the most humiliating details of the resulting peace agreement. According to Yeshu', when Peroz fought the second time against the Hephthalites, his army was routed (this is inaccurate) and he was taken prisoner. This time Peroz promised 30 mule-loads loaded with *drachmas* (silver coins) in return for his freedom. However, the state coffers were empty thanks to the wars he had fought with the result that he was able to collect only about 20 loads. Peroz then gave his son Kavadh/Kawad as a collateral/hostage for the remaining ten loads. Therefore Peroz was released. When Peroz returned back to his own country, he imposed a poll-tax and got together the required ten loads of silver and got his son back. This time the Persians paid the whole ransom out of their own pocket. The destruction of the Persian elite forces had weakened their negotiating position to such an extent that the Romans saw no need to help them this time. Furthermore, it encouraged the peoples of the Caucasus region to rise against their oppressors. The Romans, however, were in no position to exploit the Persian difficulties because Zeno was facing a serious of troubles of his own at the time.<sup>61</sup>

## **The Caucasus and Persarmenia in Flames in 481-484**

### ***The Beginning of the Revolts in 481-482***

The persecution of Christians by Peroz had created a volatile situation in Iberia, Albania and Persarmenia. When Peroz then introduced new taxes or increased the previous ones so that he could pay the promised tribute to the Hephthalites, the situation became even more volatile. The first to revolt were apparently the Albanians which then encouraged the Iberians under Vaxtang to join them in 481. When this took place in about 481/2 the Persian army together with the Persarmenians were fighting in Albania under the *Hazarabed Zarmihr Karin*. The morale among the Armenian contingent was particularly low because the apostate Armenians sided with the Persians and kept on insulting the Christians. The Iberians promised to bring a massive army of Huns against the Persians if the Persarmenians would join them. The *Marzban/Marzpan* of Armenia Artshnasp feared a revolt and withdrew to Persarmenia, but was still unable to prevent it because it was the forces under him that started it. The Christian *naxarars* ('nobles') chose Vahan Mamikonean as their leader, but Artshnasp and his apostate Armenian allies were informed of this thanks to the presence traitors amongst the Christians. Artshnasp and his allies were able to flee. When they reached Atrpatakan in Persia they decided to strike back immediately and crush the revolt in the bud. The invading Persians and their allies were defeated at the battle of Akori/Akorhi on Mount Ararat in 482. The victorious Armenians dispatched envoys to the Iberians and Romans to ask for their help. The Georgians

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<sup>59</sup> KURBANOV (2010: 167 with note 681) after Alram.

<sup>60</sup> Yeshu' the Stylite, 10-11.

<sup>61</sup> For the troubles of Zeno, see SYVÄNNE, 2020: 115-44.

promised to send the Huns and the Romans their Armenian Army, but in practice neither sent any help because both had troubles of their own. The Armenians spent the winter 482-483 in the making of defensive preparations.<sup>62</sup>

### ***The Battle of Nersehat in the District of Artaz in the Spring of 483***

At the beginning of the spring Vahan was informed that the Persian army was fast approaching the Armenian border and had reached the Her and Zarawand District of 'Caucasian Albania'. The Persians were clearly trying to surprise the Armenians by using an uncommon invasion route. The Persian force was led by five commanders Suren Pahlaw, *pushtigpan saghar* Atrnerseh, Vin-i-Xorhean, Artvshnaspn-i-Tapean, and Gdihon, Lord of Siwnik. The overall commander was *pushtigpan/pushtipan saghar* (*Pushtigban-salar*, Commander of the Royal Guard) Atrnerseh even though Suren was higher in *gah* (rank, position).<sup>63</sup>

The Armenian plan was to charge immediately with their cavalry so that the Persians would not be able to subject them to a barrage of arrows, but the Persians surprised them by attacking first before the Armenians were ready for this. The new combat doctrine introduced by Bahram V Gur made this possible. The mode of attack was unusual because it was spearheaded by the Persian left wing which routed the Armenian right wing immediately. It is probable that this actually resulted from a betrayal because the commander of the Armenian right wing appears to have been a traitor – or at least he was exposed as such in the following battle. In the centre the Persarmanian commander Sahak and the *Pushtigban-salar* engaged each other with spears and wounded each other, after which they approached each other's horses, and seized each other by the hair and fought. At this point, the Persarmenians were losing the battle and the desperate overall commander Vahan ordered the reserve of the centre forward but to no avail. It was then that Vahan charged himself with desperate courage and in fact managed to turn the tables and win the battle largely thanks to his personal bravery and bravery of his men. His example encouraged the rest to renew the combat so that the day was saved. The most direct threat to Persarmenia was now averted, but then arrived the unwelcome news that the Iberians were in trouble and needed assistance.

### ***The Persian Victory in Iberia/Georgia in about August 483***

Consequently, Vahan led the Persarmenian army into Iberia to assist its ruler Vaxtang against the Persians under Mihran. This time, however, the Persians were the victors because the Persarmenian and Iberian effort was undermined by the presence of the traitor. At the decisive battle the commander of the Persarmenian right wing Barshgh Vahewuni betrayed his forces to the Persians with the result that the rebels lost the battle. The Persian tactic in this battle was once again to charge with their cavalry immediately as had been their habit since Bahram V Gur. This was the tactic in which the Persian employed their lancers in the most effective way

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<sup>62</sup> Ghazar P'arpets'i, 231-249.

<sup>63</sup> Based on Ghazar P'arpets'i, 249-258.

possible – a direct attack with the men shooting in about three arrows during the approach before lancing.

Vahan and the remnants of the Armenian loyalist army retreated to the district of Tayk, the domains of the Mamikonean family, which was located next to the Roman border. The idea was clearly to flee to the Roman side of the border if this was necessary or try to obtain help from the Roman side of the border. After all the Romans had promised help and the people across the border were also native Armenians, but no help was forthcoming because the East Romans were divided this time among the supporters of the emperor Zeno and the supporters of the commander of the armies in the East Illus, and the latter was actually contemplating the possibility of obtaining help from the Persians. Mihran, however, followed the rebels immediately with the idea of crushing the revolt once and for all. Mihran's efforts were making progress, but then in the middle of the winter in February 483, he received an order to return immediately. This means that Peroz had by now decided to start the final preparations for the third war against the Hephthalites. Consequently, Mihran was forced to leave the war unfinished. It was thanks to this that Vahan was able to regain control of Persarmenia. Peroz's haughty attitude towards the Hephthalites was clearly causing irreparable damage to the Persian military efforts in Persarmenia.

### *The Endgame in Persarmenia in 483-484*

The Persians invaded again in the spring of 483. Their commander was once again the *Hazarabed* Zahrmihir Karin who is clearly to be identified with the Sukhra Karin of the eastern sources. He was the man who was left in charge of the matters in the absence of Peroz. The oath-breakers had informed Zarmihir of the absence of the half of the Army of Armenia possibly as a result of Persian stratagem so that he was able to attack before these could join forces with Vahan. Consequently, the Persarmenian defence was undermined from the start and when they saw the enormous size of the invading force they panicked and scattered into the wind. And so once again Vahan was forced to resort to the use of guerrilla warfare. He retreated to his own domains which were located close to the border of the Roman Empire. This time he attempted to seek help from the Armenian satraps across the border but with no result because these sided with Illus. Zarmihir, however, was unable to finish the job because it was then that Zarmihir received a *hrovartak* (an official letter, document) from Peroz in which he informed Zarmihir that the entire Persian Army had marched against the Hephthalites and that Zarmihir was to go to Iberia to subdue it and leave behind Shapuh (Shapur) Mihran as *Marzpan* of Armenia. This he did. Shapur Mihran, however, was far less successful against Vahan. At the time when the news of the destruction of the army of Peroz reached Zarmihir and Shapur, the Persian Army in Persarmenia was thoroughly demoralized. Consequently, when Zarmihir and Shapur in their turn had to retreat back to Persia, Vahan was once again able to regain control of Persarmenia for the Christian rebels. Zarmihir's advice for the new ruler would be to conclude peace on whatever terms possible. The negotiations lasted until 485 and the revolt came to an end.

### The Third Hephthalite Campaign of Peroz in 483-484

Most of the sources which mention Peroz provide some sort of description of his last campaign because it provides the readers with a moral lesson of what is to be expected when a ruler behaves in haughty unjust manner. The best and most detailed of these narratives is that provided by Procopius and I will include an excerpt from his text after I have analyzed the reasons behind the war.

All of the sources are unanimous regarding the reason for the war, which was Peroz's own decision to start a war even when his advisors advised against this. The obvious reason would of course be that Peroz was a brave warrior who could not stomach the humiliation he had suffered. According to Bal'ami,<sup>64</sup> after three to four years had passed from the previous war and the situation had stabilized enough, Peroz could no longer bear the shame and called the Supreme *Mobed* (Supreme Priest) to discuss his plans to renew the war. The *Mobed* answered that it was not right to break the treaty and be a perjurer and that the God would not be favourable to such enterprises. Peroz answered that he would use a stratagem so that he would not be a perjurer. *Mobed* answered that it would not be possible to avoid perjury with a stratagem, but Peroz would not accept this answer and started preparations for a war which lasted for a year. According to Bal'ami, the soldiers gave the same answer to Peroz as did the Supreme *Mobed*, which undoubtedly means the military leadership. Ṭabarī<sup>65</sup> and Tha'alibi<sup>66</sup> give a similar account. Both state that Peroz began the campaign against the Hephthalites against the advice given by his viziers and *marzbans*. According to Ṭabarī, Muzbudwadh went so far as to have his opinion placed in a sealed document as evidence of his opposition to the campaign. The opposition of the Persian leadership and in particular that of the *Sparapet* Bahram to the war is also mentioned by the Armenian period author Ghazar P'arpets'i<sup>67</sup> and must be therefore true.

In sum, it is clear that the Persian religious and military leadership opposed the project of Peroz even if one cannot entirely exclude the possibility that these objections were later inserted into the historical tradition after the failure of the campaign. The previous defeats would certainly have made quite a few of the leaders hesitant in a situation in which the Persarmenian, Iberian and Albanian revolts were still not crushed and required the presence of Persian forces.

According to the version preserved by Bal'ami,<sup>68</sup> Peroz appointed Sukhra /Souferai Karin, the governor of Sistan, as his deputy in the cities of Ctesiphon and Bahurasur/Bahrasir (al-Mada'in) and placed his sons Valash and Kavadh/Qubad in his custody while Peroz took his daughter Firouz-Dokht/Fayruzdukht (Daughter of Peroz) with him. The military leadership and the Chief *Mobed* opposed this and stated that it would be wrong to take a woman to the war while the sons were left at home, but to no avail. On the basis of Procopius and Sebeos, we know that this is misleading because

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<sup>64</sup> Bal'ami, 137-138.

<sup>65</sup> Ṭabarī, 876.

<sup>66</sup> Tha'alibi, 579-580.

<sup>67</sup> Ghazar P'arpets'i, 305-306.

<sup>68</sup> Bal'ami, 138-139.

according to the former Peroz took with him 30 of his sons while according to the latter he took with him seven sons all of whom perished with him.<sup>69</sup>

Then Peroz assembled an army consisting of 100,000 men and 500 elephants.<sup>70</sup> If the figure regarding the elephants is correct, then Peroz must have obtained additional elephants from his Indian allies in return for something which the sources fail to mention. The assembly point for Peroz's army was Hyrcania/Gurgan.<sup>71</sup> When the Persians then marched north-east from Gurgan and reached the column marking the border, Peroz had it drawn in front of his army by 50 elephants handled by 300 men. In this way Peroz could claim to have kept his oath not to cross the border, but according to Bal'ami, the Chief *Mobed* still said that this meant perjury.<sup>72</sup> These details are extremely silly and prove only how silly Peroz was or alternatively how silly his men were. If it was the last, then the men were really superstitious and therefore prone to be influenced by all sorts of omens and oaths. If it was the former, then this only proves how superstitious Peroz and the top leadership were – if this version is true, it is no wonder that the Hephthalites worsted the whole lot of them.

Childish superficially clever ploys like this can be found in all ancient and medieval texts regardless of culture which does suggest that there were quite a few superstitious persons around who needed reassuring, but it should still be remembered that similarly superstitious persons can still be found and it is this group of people that the rationalists/cynics seek to keep in their grip with the use of the oath taking like the one described to have been demanded by the Hephthalite ruler from Peroz. The clever cynical military leaders have always known how to use this to their advantage. In Iranian context these clever commanders include for example Suren/Surenas (vs. Crassus) and Shapur I (vs. Valerian) while in Roman context these men include such greats as Trajan, Caracalla and Belisarius (vs. Goths). These commanders were quite prepared to swear on oath anything if it served their purpose and they did not need any such silly excuses for breaking their promises as Peroz did – these men rather bragged about their treacherous behaviour and rightly so! War is an art of deceit. The enemies were extremely foolish to believe them.

When Akhshunwar/Khoushnewaz learnt of the planned campaign, he dispatched an envoy to Peroz who asked him to respect the treaty. Peroz would have none of that and challenged him to engage him in battle. Instead of this, Akhshunwar chose to fight on a locale of his own choosing and on his own terms. Therefore he had a trench, ten cubits wide and twenty deep, dug behind his army which was covered up with light branches of wood and earth to hide it from view and over which were placed bridges. When the Persians then arrived, Akhshunwar/Khoushnewaz advanced alone in front of his army and demanded that Peroz would meet him face-to-face. Akhshunwar naturally accused Peroz of faithlessness and required him to keep his oath, while Peroz said that the enemy should prepare for combat. This ploy increased the moral ascendancy of Akhshunwar both in the eyes of his own men and the enemy. The justice was on the Hephthalite side. In order to make the case even more poignant, Akhshunwar had the peace agreement placed on the tip of the lance and paraded before

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<sup>69</sup> Bal'ami, 138-139; Tabarī, 878-879; Sebeos, 4.

<sup>70</sup> Bal'ami, 138.

<sup>71</sup> Ghazar P'arpet's I, 305-308.

<sup>72</sup> Bal'ami, 138-139; Tabarī, 878-879. Note that one should add to the figures the non-combatants.



the armies. According to Ṭabarī, the Persians understood that their cause was not just and were therefore suffering from poor morale. According to one version preserved by both Ṭabarī and Bal‘ami, the Hephthalites then withdrew one *parasang* behind the trench during the night with the result that the Persians started a reckless pursuit in the morning. I would suggest that this tells only the first part of the story and that Tha‘alibi and Procopius preserve the feigned flight part missing from these and which can therefore be used to add detail missing from the others.<sup>73</sup> At the same time we should still keep in mind that the above discussion includes also material that is missing from Procopius, but is still likely to be true.

Procopius<sup>74</sup> (with comments and additions inside the parentheses and with underlining added to show the doctrinal consequences of the defeat):

“Very soon after this, he disregarded the oath he had sworn,<sup>75</sup> because he was keen to avenge to the Huns the insult that they had done to him. Therefore, he at once assembled together all the Persians and their allies, and led them against the Hephthalites; he took with him all of his sons about thirty in number except one, Cabades<sup>76</sup> by name, who happened to have just passed the age of boyhood. The Hephthalites when they learnt of his invasion, were angry because their enemy had deceived them, and bitterly reproached their king and accused him of having abandoned them to the Medes.<sup>77</sup> He laughed and asked of them what in the world of theirs he had abandoned, ... Then the Hephthalites zealously demanded that they should march out to meet the invaders, but their king sought to restrain their eagerness... he maintained that there was not yet any definite information regarding the invasion, because the Persians were still within their own boundaries.<sup>78</sup> Therefore he remained where he was, and made the following preparations. In the plain where the Persians were to begin their invasion of the Hephthalite lands, he marked off an extensive tract of land and dug a deep trench of sufficient width; however in the centre he left a small portion of the ground untouched to serve as a causeway wide enough for ten horses. He placed reeds over the trench, and covered the reeds with earth, and thereby concealed the trench. He then instructed the Hunnic forces that, when they would retire behind the trench, they were to array themselves together into a narrow column after which they were to pass slowly across the trench by using the causeway while taking great care not to fall into the trench. Then he hung from the top of the royal banner the salt over which Peroz had formerly sworn the oath that he had betrayed by attacking the Huns. ... when the scouts informed him that the Persians had reached the city of Gorgo, which was located at the Persian border, and that they had

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<sup>73</sup> Bal‘ami, 139-142; Ṭabarī, 876-880; Ya‘qubi, 114.

<sup>74</sup> Procopius, I 4.1-35 (author’s translation based on Dewing p. 21ff.)

<sup>75</sup> Procopius refers here to the oath of the first war which he had described, but this is a mistake because Peroz was now actually breaking the oaths he had taken after his second capture.

<sup>76</sup> Kavadh/Kawad; this is a mistake because Valash, the next ruler had also stayed behind.

<sup>77</sup> i.e. the Hephthalites were dissatisfied that their king had allowed Peroz back to his own domains after the second capture.

<sup>78</sup> this proves that the Hephthalites possessed adequate network of spies inside the Persian territory who could observe the collection of enemy forces for a campaign.

already left that place and were now advancing against his army, the king remained behind the trench with the greater part of his troops while he dispatched a small detachment forward with instructions to allow the enemy to see them from distance in the plain after which they were to flee at full speed behind the trench. ... They did as ordered. When they approached the trench, they arrayed themselves into a narrow column, crossed over and united with the rest of the army. But the Persians, who had not perceived the stratagem, pursued them at full speed across the very level plain, because they felt boundless anger towards their enemy, and so every one of them fell into the trench, not only the first but also those who followed them. It was thanks to the furious pursuit, as I have said, that they failed to see the catastrophe which had befallen onto their leaders, but all of them fell in on top of them with their horses and lances, so that they naturally destroyed not only them but also themselves.<sup>79</sup> Among those who were killed were Perozes and all his sons.<sup>80</sup> And when he was about to fall into this trench, some claim that he realized the danger, and grasped the pearl from his right ear and threw it, ... doubtlessly because he did not want anyone else wear it after him; ... This story, however, I consider untrustworthy, because a man in such a perilous situation would not have had time for anything; but I suggest that his ear was simply crushed in the disaster so that the pearl disappeared somewhere. The Roman Emperor made every attempt to buy this pearl from the Hephthalites, but was singularly unsuccessful in his attempt. The reason for this was that the barbarians could not find it even though they sought it with great labour. However, some claim that the Hephthalites found it later and sold it to Cabades... Hence Perozes was destroyed together with the entire Persian army. Even those very few who were lucky enough not to fall into the trench were at the mercy of the enemy. As a result of this experience the Persians established a law which stipulated that when they were inside enemy territory, they were never to pursue the enemy even if it would appear as if the enemy had been driven back by force.<sup>81</sup> After this the Persians who had remained behind in their own land and had not marched with Perozes, chose as their king Cabades, the youngest son of Perozes,<sup>82</sup> ... It was then that the Persians became subjects and tributaries of the Hephthalites until the date when Cabades had secured his power and no longer felt it necessary to pay the annual tribute to them. These barbarians ruled over the Persians for two years.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> I would suggest that this does not refer to the use of a single cavalry line with several ranks, but to the typical two cavalry lines both of which fell into the trench thanks to the fact that the clouds of dust would have covered the view from those behind, hence the men in the rear who were behind the leaders. SAUER et al. (2013: 597) is completely ignorant of the ancient tactical systems in suggesting that the use of ditches would have been implausible.

<sup>80</sup> The eastern sources mention also the capture of the Chief Mobadh/Mobed, the daughter of Peroz and many of the mighty men of Persia.

<sup>81</sup> This combat doctrine prevented the effective pursuit of the enemy by the cavalry. It should be stressed that the information provided by Procopius regarding this is definitely accurate because the Roman army possessed complete units of Persian deserters and Procopius had also witnessed the Persians in action.

<sup>82</sup> This is a mistake for Valash who ruled from 484 until 488 when he was ousted by Kavadh.

<sup>83</sup> Kavadh became ruler with the help of the Hephthalitae in 488 so that he presumably continued to pay tribute until 490.

From the account preserved by the period author Lazar Parpeci<sup>84</sup> we learn what happened immediately after the death of Peroz and destruction of the Persian army. The *Hazarabed* Zarmihr Karin, who is to be equated with Sukhra of the Iranian sources, abandoned his campaign against the Iberian and Persarmenian rebels immediately and retreated to Ctesiphon which allowed the rebels under Vahan Mamikonean to regain possession of Persarmenia – we do not know what the Iberian ruler Vaxtang did, but one may assume that he too was able to regain control of his realm. When Zarmihr reached Ctesiphon, he gathered around him the remnants of the Iranian nobility and began the discussions of who should succeed Peroz. At the instigation of Zarmihr, their choice fell on Valash/Vagharsh/Balas/Bilash (484-488). When the high and mighty then assembled around the new ruler, the de facto ruler *Hazarabed* took the lead and advised the ruler to reach accommodation with the peoples who had rebelled against the Persians under Peroz. This meant the conclusion of peace with the Persarmenians on whatever terms they chose and so it happened. The Persians not only needed to end the revolts, but they also needed to obtain soldiers from their foes in order to save their Empire. The Empire was not only threatened by the Hephthalites but also by other Persians who did not accept the choice of *Hazarabed* but supported another candidate called Zarch. Fortunately for Zarmihr, his men were able to defeat Zarch with the help of the Persarmenians and then force him to seek a place of refuge from some unnamed mountains where he was then captured. It is unfortunate that we do not know whether the Persians concluded their peace with the Hephthalites before they defeated Zarch or only after it. The way how Zarmihr Karin (i.e. Sukhra) saved the Persian realm will be discussed in a separate study.

### **Peroz (459-484) as a Ruler**

The text of Agathias<sup>85</sup> provides the best summary of the reign of Peroz and what type of person Peroz was:

“The next reign was that of Peroz an exceedingly daring and warlike man. His mind was filled with grandiose ambitions, but his judgment was far from sound and he possessed a great deal more valour than discretion. Consequently, he lost his life in an expedition against the Ephthalites not so much, I imagine, through the strength of his opponents as through his own recklessness. Though he should have taken all the necessary precautions and reconnaissance measures to safeguard his advance into enemy territory against ambush he fell straight into a trap, a series of carefully camouflaged pits and trenches that stretched over the plain for a very great distance. He perished there together with his army ... outmanoeuvred by the Huns – an ignominious way of ending his life.”

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<sup>84</sup> Ghazar P'arpets'i, 308-356.

<sup>85</sup> Agathias, 4.27.3-4.

## The Persian Cavalry Combat Doctrine after Peroz

The contrast between the successes of Bahram V Gur against the Hephthalites and the defeats of Peroz could not have been any greater. It was Peroz who undid much of the successes of Bahram and whose poisoned legacy influenced the Persian combat doctrine to generations to come.

When used correctly the military reforms of Bahram had brought great successes because the direct attack supported by equally powerful archery against the nomads limited the time that the enemy could subject the Persians under their own archery barrage. This was the cavalry tactic that the Sarmatians, Alans, and Armenians had used very successfully against the Parthians and Persians, and which the Romans and Goths had copied from them and which they in their turn had then used with equal success when they faced the Persians in battle. It is very likely that Bahram had copied this tactic from the Romans and Armenians after his defeats and that he just added to it the archery techniques that he had learned among the Arabs. It is possible that the Hunnic cavalry tactics and archery had also some influence on this, but there is no definite evidence for it. On top of this, the Persians had one major advantage over their tutors the Armenians and Romans. The Persian cavalry was more heavily armoured than the Roman, which meant that they were in a better position to achieve contact with the enemy cavalry despite being subjected to the barrage of arrows.<sup>86</sup>

This tactic was highly effective when it was used in the right circumstances, but when used without due precautions, as it was by Peroz, it resulted in disaster and it was because of this that the Persians in general returned back to their more orderly tactical system which put greater emphasis on the pre-charge archery phase and the use of orderly ranks and slow methodological use of the cavalry both in combat and in pursuit. This is not to say that the Persians would not have made the same mistakes again as they did under Peroz or that they would not have used the impetuous cavalry charge sometimes, because they did, but that the principal cavalry combat doctrine returned back to its roots.<sup>87</sup>

The inheritance of Peroz was therefore the loss of tactical flexibility. As a result of Bahram's reforms, the Persian cavalry was equally suited to close quarters fighting and prolonged archery duels as required by the situation. They could vary their bows and archery techniques and tactics accordingly. But now after the disasters of Peroz the situation changed. In the future, the cases in which the Persians started to pursue their enemies carelessly or relentlessly were very rare because most of the Persian commanders followed the standard combat doctrine.<sup>88</sup> This was the lesson the Persians learnt from the mistakes of Peroz and it was to serve them well in the future, but this had also a less positive side to it as well which was that the standard Persian cavalry tactic became less versatile than it had been under Bahram V Gur, Yazdgerd II and Peroz. Henceforth the Persians concentrated only on one tactical doctrine, which was to use their cavalry in a slow methodological manner preferably in a difficult broken terrain for a prolonged archery barrage to soften up the enemy in which the melee phase followed only after this. This sacrificed

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<sup>86</sup> For a different analysis of the tactics and equipment, see FARROKH, 2017: 202-212.

<sup>87</sup> SYVÄNNE (2004) analyzes this in detail in chapter 10.1 and appendices.

<sup>88</sup> Some of the examples can be found in the appendices of SYVÄNNE, 2004.

the mobility of the cavalry and tactical flexibility for the sake of orderly safe combat formations and for the sake of slow and orderly pursuit of the enemy, and we have to remember that the mobility of the cavalry was its greatest asset and that it was the open terrain that all other cavalries sought so that they could use their mobility to their advantage and not the other way around. Furthermore, it was impossible to conduct an effective pursuit of the enemy when this was forbidden by the combat doctrine.<sup>89</sup> This is the type of Persian enemy that is later described in the sixth century Roman military manual *Strategikon*.<sup>90</sup> Bahram V Gur had given priority for the lance attack accompanied by powerful archery over the slow moving shower archery tactic, but now it was the other way around. This was the true military inheritance of Peroz for future generations, but it was not his intended inheritance – it was the result of his failures as a military commander.

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<sup>89</sup> The Romans had solved this by using *koursores* for pursuit and *defensores* as their protectors together with the actual cavalry reserves, which could also have infantry forces following after them. The use of *koursores* with *defensores* enabled the Romans to have it both ways. The *koursores* charged after their prey with abandon, but were protected by those behind them.

<sup>90</sup> The information provided by the *Strategikon* is analyzed in SYVÄNNE (2004).

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