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Ekaterina Nechaeva

► **To cite this version:**

Ekaterina Nechaeva. International Political Hospitality and Non-Hospitality in Late Antiquity: High-Profile Strangers between Asylum and Extradition. Fauchon-Claudon, Claire; Le Guennec, Marie-Adeline. *Hospitalité et régulation de l'altérité dans l'Antiquité méditerranéenne*, pp.235-247, 2022, 978-2-35613-476-9. hal-03960834

**HAL Id: hal-03960834**

**<https://hal.science/hal-03960834>**

Submitted on 28 Jan 2023

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## ***International Political Hospitality and Non-Hospitality in Late Antiquity: High-Profile Strangers between Asylum and Extradition\****

*Ekaterina Nechaeva*

The Late Antique world was, in many ways, interconnected through mobility of individuals across physical space. Military renegades, as well as religious, intellectual, and political dissidents often chose, or were forced, to move, both within and outside of their home communities and states. Sources show that Roman borders – be it with the Persian empire or with the “*Barbaricum*” – could be porous, allowing for intense and relatively free cross-border traffic, including that of defectors and refugees. Apart from voluntary defectors and constrained refugees there also existed a third category, that of those forced to move across borders. Frequent military conflicts contributed to the movement of captives and deportees.

Cases of defection and captivity among the representatives of the elites followed special patterns, often different from those of the “common” population. Thus, in spite of the evident difference between captivity and defection – in the modes of moving across the border, as well as in the degree of agency involved – some significant parallels can be drawn between the two categories.

The receiving side was often interested in welcoming high-profile defectors and refugees from the adversary, as well as in taking high-profile captives in order to utilise their expertise or influence. We know several stories of prominent defectors and captives who were well received, held high appointments and built strong careers, often in the military sector, in their new countries. In some cases, the receiving side acted as a protector when these migrants’ states raised a claim for their extradition. I will refer to the entirety of these phenomena as international “*political hospitality*”.

### **WELCOMING HIGH-PROFILE STRANGERS**

Military confrontations between Rome and Persia, particularly frequent in the IV<sup>th</sup> and in the VI<sup>th</sup> centuries, intensified the “exchange” of defectors and refugees<sup>1</sup>. Thus, regarding those who moved from Persia to Rome in the IV<sup>th</sup> century, to name a few, we know of: Hormisdas, the son of the Persian king Hormisdas II, who was welcomed in the Roman empire in 324.

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\* The work presented in this paper has been partially supported by ANR Investments d’avenir (ANR-16-IDEX-0004 ULNE).

<sup>1</sup> See the article by M. Heil, examines the cases of the Persians passing to the Roman side, but also accesses information about the Romans in Persia and provides lists of the Persians in Rome and Romans in Persia in the IV-VI centuries: Heil 2006.

and was made a cavalry commander and the office of *comes rei militaris*<sup>2</sup>; Pusaеus, a Persian fortress commander, who, having delivered the fortress Anathan and himself to the Romans in 363, later become a *dux* of Egypt and received the rank of tribune<sup>3</sup>. Regarding those who moved from Rome to Persia in the same century, we know of: Antoninus, a Roman merchant and official from Nisibis, and his co-citizen Craugasius, who defected to the Persians and in 359 became, respectively the chief advisor of the shah and the second person after him in the shah's entourage<sup>4</sup>. The Roman–Persian conflicts of the VI<sup>th</sup> century brought about an increase in movements of refugees and defectors. In 502 a *comes Armeniae* Constantine delivered Theodosiopolis to the Persians and subsequently became a general fighting on the Persian side (until he fled for the second time to join the Romans)<sup>5</sup>. Well-known are the cases of defection of the three Persarmenian military commanders (and brothers) Aratius, Narses, and Isaaces, who in 530 deserted from the Persian to the Roman side<sup>6</sup>. Narses later became a *dux* of Thebaides (c. 535), then *magister utriusque militiae* and *comes rei militaris* in Italy (539-450) and in the East (543). Aratius was *dux Palaestinae* (535/536), then then *magister utriusque militiae and comes rei militaris* in Italy (539-450). Isaaces became a *dux* at Citharizon (in Armenia IV) (543)<sup>7</sup>.

Similarly, high-profile renegades moved between different barbarian kingdoms and the Roman empire, often receiving welcome and employment. In the early 550s. Justinian accepted in Constantinople a fugitive noble Lombard and a possible heir to the Lombard crown Ildiges<sup>8</sup>, who had to leave home because of political intrigues against him. The emperor is said to have “treated [him] with particular kindness” and to have appointed him the commander of one of the *scholae palatinae*<sup>9</sup>.

“Political hospitality” could also be extended to dissidents (e.g. religious or intellectual), escaping to a foreign power from persecutions or constraints at home. The most famous case is probably that of the asylum granted to the Hellenic philosophers by the court of Chosroes, who, according to Agathias Scholasticus moved to Persia from Justinian's intolerant Christian empire<sup>10</sup>.

### WELCOMING HIGH-PROFILE CAPTIVES

Some cases reveal that high-profile captives could also be re-employed in a similar capacity as that fulfilled before the forced move. Thus, in 541 Belisarius surrendered the

<sup>2</sup> PLRE-I, 442, *s.u.* Hormisdas 2.

<sup>3</sup> PLRE-I, 755, *s.u.* Pusaеus.

<sup>4</sup> Amm. Marc. 18.5.1 sq.; 18.10.1 sq.

<sup>5</sup> Ps.-Josh. Styl. 48-55. About him: Nechaeva 2020.

<sup>6</sup> Procop., *Pers.*, 1.12.22; 1.15.31; 1.19.37; *Goth.*, 2.13.17.

<sup>7</sup> PLRE-III, 103-104, *s.u.* Aratius, 928-930, *s.u.* Narses 2, 718-719, *s.u.* Isaaces.

<sup>8</sup> PLRE-III, 616-617, *s.u.* Ildigisal.

<sup>9</sup> Procop., *Goth.*, 1.35.11-22; 4.27.1.

<sup>10</sup> Agath. 2.30-31. On this episode e.g.: Cameron Averil 1969, 175; Fox 2005, 19-50; Cameron Alan 2016a, 221-222 and 215 against Tardieu 1990, 131, 121. See also: Kaldellis 2004, 101 and note 24; Evans 2000, 70; Athanassiadi 1993, 25, note 184.

Persian garrison at Sisauronon and captured its commander Bleschames (Βλησγάμης) and its inhabitants. This case was probably half-way between defection and captivity, as the surrender had been negotiated in advance and the Romans persuaded those besieged to “take pledges for their safety and deliver themselves and the fortress to the Romans<sup>11</sup>”. The inhabitants, who are said to have been Christians of Roman origin, were spared, while the garrison commander Bleschames and his men were sent to Constantinople and then dispatched by Justinian to Italy to fight the Goths<sup>12</sup>. We don’t know what Bleschames’ rank as a Roman commander was, but his career resembles those of Aratius, Narses and Isaacs.

Another interesting example is the story of a Persian general and a Christian martyr Pīrān-Gušnasp Mar Grigor<sup>13</sup>. Coming from a prominent Zoroastrian family – the house of Mihrān – he held a high military appointment in the northern regions of Persia, Iberia and Albania. Around the year 518 or 521, Pīrān-Gušnasp converted to Christianity, taking the name Grigor. In 528, during a Roman incursion into Persia, he was taken prisoner and brought to Constantinople<sup>14</sup>, where he is said to have been well received by the emperor, and to have been charged with an important military position<sup>15</sup>. While we have no other precise information about the character of this appointment, there is no reason to distrust this evidence, considering the existing the practice of employment of “expat experts”.

There is some evidence to suggest that the Persians were also eager to use the services of competent captives (e.g. Sergius, a leading citizen from Edessa, carried off to Persia in 601, who, while in captivity, is said to have been treated with honour and included by the Persian king among his close associates<sup>16</sup>).

### HOSPITALITY THREATENED

While during times of war cases of defection and consequent international “political hospitality” were particularly frequent, when peace arrived it sometimes threatened this hospitality. Conclusion of a diplomatic agreement normally required that both sides stop accepting fugitives/deserters/runaways, and return those who had previously been accepted. Requests for the extradition of runaways and the release of captives frequently accompanied diplomatic negotiations<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> Procop., *Pers.*, 2.19.23.

<sup>12</sup> Procop., *Pers.*, 2.19.24-25.

<sup>13</sup> All of the details we know of Mar Grigor’s life come from a sixth century. East-Syriac anonymous account of his martyrdom. The hagiographical source, though it requires obvious methodological caution, is generally considered reliable in regard to the historical details provided. For the text and the context: Jullien, ed. 2015a, xiii-xlvii; Jullien, trans., comm. 2015b.

<sup>14</sup> *Mart. Grig.* 8 (Jullien, éd. 2015a, 52; Jullien, transl., comm. 2015b, 53).

<sup>15</sup> *Mart. Grig.* 8 (Jullien, éd. 2015a, 52; Jullien, transl., comm. 2015b, 53).

<sup>16</sup> PLRE-III, *s.u.* Sergius 38, p. 1138.

<sup>17</sup> E.g. Malchus, fr. 2 (Blockley, ed. 1983); Procop., *Goth.*, 1.3; 3.16; Menander, *fr.*, 6.1 (Blockley, éd. 1985). See

also: Nechaeva 2014a, 111.

Thus, the Endless Peace Treaty concluded between Rome and Persia in 532 regulated several issues of population transfer and exchange of individuals<sup>18</sup>. As I have recently argued elsewhere, it was on the occasion of the Endless Peace Treaty that the Persian side claimed the extradition of the above-mentioned Persian Christian general Pīrān-Gušnasp/Mar Grigor<sup>19</sup>. Remarkably, Justinian is said to have agreed to release the prominent captive only upon receiving from the Persian side guarantees that Mar Grigor would not be persecuted for his Christian beliefs<sup>20</sup>. It is probable that this demand was also included as a condition in the same peace treaty<sup>21</sup>. The peace treaty, as we know from the evidence given by Agathias, contained a special clause, included in the agreement at the initiative of the Persian king, to protect the Hellenic philosophers, who were returning to the Roman empire, from eventual persecution<sup>22</sup>. The deconstruction of the East-Syriac *Martyrdom of Mar Grigor* and its comparison with the evidence by Agathias allow to suppose that that the release of Mar Grigor and the return on the philosophers were connected.

It seems likely that the Endless Peace Treaty contained two symmetrical protection clauses: for the pagan philosophers returning to the Christian Roman empire and for the Christian general coming back to Zoroastrian Persia<sup>23</sup>. These clauses are unique in the context of Late Antique diplomacy<sup>24</sup> and represent the high point of international “political hospitality”: both Justinian and Chosroes managed to extend this hospitality by protecting their protégés even after they returned to their countries of origin<sup>25</sup>.

Another remarkable case of the complex balance between the practices of international “political hospitality” and the rules of diplomacy is the story of the above-mentioned Lombard refugee Ildiges, who was welcomed and employed by Justinian. Before coming to Constantinople Ildiges tried to seek support at various barbarian courts. A victim of political intrigues at home, around the years 539/540 he was forced to leave the Lombards and escape: first to the Slavs, then to the Gepids (hoping to recover the Lombard throne with Gepid support). However, once the Gepids and the Lombards concluded a peace treaty in 549, the Lombard king Audoin demanded the extradition of Ildiges. While the Gepids refused the demand, they were probably not able to maintain the “political hospitality” towards Ildiges without compromising the peace treaty, so they suggested the refugee leave their territory<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> Nechaeva 2017, 365-368.

<sup>19</sup> Nechaeva 2017, 370-380.

<sup>20</sup> *Mart. Grig.*, 9 (Jullien, éd. 2015a, 53; Jullien, transl., comm. 2015b, 54).

<sup>21</sup> Nechaeva 2017, 370.

<sup>22</sup> Agath. 2.31.

<sup>23</sup> For a deconstruction of the Syriac and Agathias texts: Nechaeva 2017.

<sup>24</sup> While some agreements between Rome included clauses protecting religious groups, the protection targeted at individuals appears to have been unique (for a discussion and references: Nechaeva 2017, 364).

<sup>25</sup> For the conjectural suggestion that the return of the philosophers was stimulated by an extradition demand from the Roman side: Nechaeva 2017, 376-380.

<sup>26</sup> Procop., *Goth.*, 3.35.11-22.

Probably after again spending some time with the Slavs<sup>27</sup>, in the early 550s the fugitive Ildiges arrived in Constantinople<sup>28</sup>.

Justinian saw no reason to accede to the demand for the extradition of Ildiges which was addressed to him by the Lombard king Audoin<sup>29</sup>. In the spring of 552, when a new war between the Lombards and the Gepids began, Ildiges saw another chance to get Gepid support for claiming the Lombard power. Although protected by Justinian's "political hospitality", Ildiges' status was probably close to that of a hostage, or even of a captive: he could not freely leave Constantinople and so to reach the Gepids was forced to flee in secret, whereupon he was pursued by the imperial military forces<sup>30</sup>.

Ildiges managed to reach the Gepids; however, the war was soon over and his hosts were again tied by their international agreements: with the Lombards and with the Romans. Consequently, both sides demanded that the Gepid ruler Thorisin surrender the runaway. As Procopius informs us, Thorisin was confused and consulted his tribesmen, who prohibited him from betraying the Gepid<sup>31</sup>. To overcome the stalemate, Thorisin resorted to the rule of reciprocity and demanded Audoin, the Lombard king, give back a Gepid fugitive, Ustrigotthus, at the time sheltered by the Lombards<sup>32</sup>. By demanding this mutual extradition Thorisin consciously put his Lombard counterpart in the same impossible situation. Having accepted a fugitive, the host was responsible for the protection of his "suppliant": *ικέτης*. These xenial customs, probably similar among the Lombards and the Gepids, prevented both rulers from fulfilling their international obligation of extradition. Neither Audoin nor Thorisin could openly violate the rules of "political hospitality". They were also in no position to risk a war with the Romans, or with each other. The only way out of this conundrum of contradictions was through clandestine methods: the two kings conspired and each secretly killed his suppliant<sup>33</sup>.

#### **NON-HOSPITALITY: THE CASE OF JOHN OF TELLA**

Sources often focus on prominent figures and thus, somewhat paradoxically, provide us with many examples of exceptional "political hospitality", when the receiving society was eager to accept high-profile strangers and to protect them in various ways from the dangers of extradition. Against the background of the cases described above, it seems important to analyse the story of the defection to Persia, and the subsequent arrest and extradition back to the Roman empire, of the non-Chalcedonian bishop John of Tella, as it reveals a different

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<sup>27</sup> The choice of the Slavs can probably be explained by their minor involvement in the system of international obligations and diplomacy (Nechaeva 2016, 231).

<sup>28</sup> Procop., *Goth.*, 4.27.1.

<sup>29</sup> Reference to the treaty between the Roman empire and the Lombards that was concluded in 546/547, making Ildiges liable for extradition.

<sup>30</sup> Procop., *Goth.*, 4.27.25.

<sup>31</sup> Procop., *Goth.*, 4.27.25.

<sup>32</sup> The story of this Gepid crown prince, removed from the power and obliged to go into exile among his adversaries, in a way mirrors the story of Ildiges: *PLRE-III*, 1396, *s.u.* Ustrigotthus; Nechaeva 2016, 233.

<sup>33</sup> For a more detailed analysis of the episode: Nechaeva 2016, 230-239.

(and probably more common) framework of “political non-hospitality”. Analysis of this case also allows us to understand what mechanisms were available to ensure the non-acceptance and/or extradition of unwanted strangers. This problem must have been particularly relevant for Rome and Persia, as the state border in Mesopotamia was porous<sup>34</sup>.

The particularity of the region between the middle Euphrates and Tigris rivers was determined by a complex combination of linguistic, cultural and religious factors, and by the unity and diversity of people on both sides of the Roman-Persian border. Syriac-speaking Christian groups were spread throughout Roman and Persian territories, creating communities that transcended the state borders. However, political conflicts, as well as religious controversies, determined considerable divisions.

### **Trans-border dissident proselytism**

When the Christological discord in the East became radicalised during the period of the enforcement of the Chalcedonian creed by the emperors Justin and Justinian<sup>35</sup>, violent conflicts and persecution produced numerous religious dissidents and resulted in intense mobility in the region of Mesopotamia, including across the Roman-Persian border<sup>36</sup>. This was the background of the life and activities of one of the most prominent figures of the non-Chalcedonian<sup>37</sup> movement of the East: John of Tella.

We are quite well informed of John of Tella’s biography thanks to the surviving parts of his own works<sup>38</sup> and two Syriac lives<sup>39</sup>. When in 521 an imperial edict compelling all bishops either to embrace the Chalcedonian creed or leave their dioceses was published in the East<sup>40</sup>,

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<sup>34</sup> While the border’s permeability could differ depending on the period, as well as on the category of people involved and the circumstances of the movement, Northern Mesopotamia (intending Mesopotamia as a region, not as a province, as in Lee 1993, 49, note 1) is sometimes characterised as have been an open region and as a zone of transit, where moving across the Roman-Persian frontier was relatively easy – in particular, in periods of peace (see Lee 1993, 49 and 54-55 for discussion and references).

<sup>35</sup> Menze 2008, 16-56.

<sup>36</sup> See Harvey 1990a, 24.

<sup>37</sup> On the term: Menze 2008, 2 sq.

<sup>38</sup> On them: Menze 2006, 49-53.

<sup>39</sup> The first *Life of the blessed John bishop of the city Tella* is the 24th chapter of John of Ephesus’ monumental hagiographical collection of stories of Mesopotamian and Syrian ascetics, written in the 560s (Brooks, ed. 1924, 513-526). It is probable that John of Ephesus’ earliest work, likely written in the 540s, which has not survived, focused on the first persecutions of the non-Chalcedonians in the 530s and contained more information about the persecution of John of Tella, and his flight and arrest: Harvey 1990a, 30. The second *Life* of John of Tella was written by Elias in the form of an extensive letter written in Syriac to an unknown non-Chalcedonian addressee sometime after 542 (Syriac edition: Brooks, ed. 1907; English translation: Ghanem 1970). The author, not known from other sources, presents himself as a personal witness to many of the events he describes, claiming to have lived with John as his personal disciple and to have been arrested together with the saint (for an analysis of Elias’ *autopsia*: Palmer 1987, 209-211, 203; Andrade 2009, 203; Harvey 1990a, 34; Ghanem 1970, 8-9; Menze 2008, 229-230).

<sup>40</sup> Brooks, ed. 1907, 50; Ghanem 1907, 59. For the circumstances of the schism of the non-Chalcedonians: Menze 2008, 25-57.

John, the bishop of Tella, was among the many bishops who refused to sign the libellus and had to leave his see<sup>41</sup>. With his fellow bishops he withdrew to the mountains in the region of Marde, where he hid during the following years<sup>42</sup>. While in exile, probably as early as 522/523, John started performing ordinations of deacons and priests, by the mandate of the patriarch Severus, ordaining, as the sources claim, thousands for the disrupted non-Chalcedonian communities, which faced a great shortage of clergy<sup>43</sup>.

Both John of Ephesus and Elias say that candidates for ordinations were sent to John from the territories that included Persia<sup>44</sup>. Elias mentions numerous conversions of the followers of the Church of the East to the Orthodox – non-Chalcedonian – creed, which happened in Persia under the influence of Tella<sup>45</sup>. John himself visited Persia several times<sup>46</sup>. Nathanael Andrade widens the Pseudo Zaccharias' definition of John's network of monks and priests – "politeia"<sup>47</sup> – to a "frontier politeia", underlining that "John's ministry extended on both sides of the frontier and his ordinations thereby enabled the anti-Chalcedonians of both Roman and Persian controlled Mesopotamia to be integrated conceptually into a single united church"<sup>48</sup>. The cross-border activities of John of Tella must also have disturbed the Persian Church of the East<sup>49</sup>, which since the Council of Seleucia in 488 had been acknowledged as the acceptable form of Christianity in Persia<sup>50</sup>. Furthermore, John of Tella probably took part in the – unsuccessful – initiative to convert the Lakhmid Arabs<sup>51</sup>. The Sasanians could hardly welcome such intruding attempts to convert their allies<sup>52</sup>.

By 530 the non-Chalcedonian bishops had established in the East a well-connected network of priests and a powerful community that threatened the imperial Chalcedonian authority. In 532/533 John was summoned to Constantinople by Justinian to attend a discussion about faith with Chalcedonian bishops<sup>53</sup>. It has been suggested by V. Menze that the period of *rapprochement* in Justinian's policy towards the non-Chalcedonians in the first half of the VI<sup>th</sup> century probably related not only to internal but also to foreign affairs. As Menze remarks, "the undertakings of John and other non-Chalcedonians in Persia and Arabia presented both a threat and an opportunity". Reintegration of the opponents

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<sup>41</sup> Brooks, ed. 1907, 56-57; Ghanem 1907, 67; Brooks, ed. 1924, 515.

<sup>42</sup> Menze 2008, 58, note 219.

<sup>43</sup> Menze 2008, 175-186; Brooks, ed. 1907, 58-59; Ghanem 1907, 69.

<sup>44</sup> Brooks, ed. 1924, 519; Brooks, ed. 1907, 35-36; Ghanem 1970, 71-72.

<sup>45</sup> Brooks, ed. 1907, 35-36; Ghanem 1970, 71-72.

<sup>46</sup> Brooks, ed. 1907, 72; Ghanem 1970, 83.

<sup>47</sup> Ps. Zach. 8.5.81-82.

<sup>48</sup> Andrade 2009, 213-214.

<sup>49</sup> Menze & Akalin, ed. 2009, 10.

<sup>50</sup> Shahîd 1995, 727.

<sup>51</sup> Brooks, ed. 1907, 62-63; Ghanem 1970, 73. Andrade 2009, 213 and note 43. On the previous attempts (of Philoxenus and of Severus) to convert the Lakhmids: Shahîd 1995, 702-709. For the alleged missionary activity of John of Tella in South Arabia: Shahîd 1995, 710.

<sup>52</sup> See Shahîd 1995, 722-729.

<sup>53</sup> Brooks, ed. 1907, 59; Ghanem 1970, 69. For an analysis of the debate and of its context: Menze 2008, 58-101; for the account: Brock 1981.



of the Chalcedon creed into the church of the empire could provide the emperor with an opportunity to “broaden the empire’s influence towards the East”, and over Persia<sup>54</sup>.

No compromise was achieved over the Conversations in Constantinople: John and his fellow bishops refused Justinian’s request to stop undertaking ordinations and returned to their dwelling places<sup>55</sup>. For John, this probably meant returning to the vicinity of the Persian border<sup>56</sup>, where he resumed his ordaining activities.

In 536 Justinian’s policy of *rapprochement* failed: the Council of Constantinople condemned several non-Chalcedonian leaders, opening a new wave of persecutions<sup>57</sup>. John of Tella succeeded, as W.H.C. Frend has stated, in “significantly consolidating Monophysitism on each side of the Romano-Persian frontier in north-east Syria in Euphratesia, Osrhoene, Mesopotamia and Adibadene<sup>58</sup>”.

### **A criminal dissident: trans-border cooperation and arrest**

With the permission of – or even commanded by – the emperor<sup>59</sup>, Ephrem of Amida, the Chalcedonian patriarch of Antioch and an *ex-comes Orientis*<sup>60</sup>, made his violent “descent to the East<sup>61</sup>” to hunt down the non-Chalcedonians<sup>62</sup>.

The following description and analysis of the events around John of Tella’s arrest are mostly based on the account by Elias.

To find and arrest John of Tella, who at the time of Ephrem’s descent was on Persian territory, the patriarch entered into contact with the Persian military official of the border region, marzban Mihrdad. Sending his trusted men across the border, Ephrem asked the Sasanian official for military assistance in the apprehension of John of Tella<sup>63</sup>. Elias characterises Ephrem’s communication with the marzban as scheming<sup>64</sup>, mentioning a bribe<sup>65</sup>: the patriarch promised<sup>64</sup> to marzban that John would receive a lot of gold<sup>66</sup>. According

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<sup>54</sup> Menze 2008, 11.

<sup>55</sup> Brooks, ed. 1907, 60, lines 10-11; Ghanem 1970, 70.

<sup>56</sup> Menze 2008, 184.

<sup>57</sup> Menze 2008, 11-12.

<sup>58</sup> Frend 1972, 283-284.

<sup>59</sup> Brooks, ed. 1907, 65; Ghanem 1970, 76.

<sup>60</sup> *PLRE-II*, 394-396, *s.u.* Ephraemius.

<sup>61</sup> Brooks, ed. 1924, 620-621; Brooks, ed. 1907, 65; Ghanem 1970, 76.

<sup>62</sup> As John of Ephesus described it, “he sent armoured hosts of fighting men against them as if to fight against the barbarians, and they expelled and ejected and scattered and dispersed them over the countries”: here and further quoted in translation of Brooks, ed. 1924, 620-621. According to Elias, “the emperor gave Ephraim the power which he asked for and a Roman army”. Here and further quoted in translation of Ghanem 1970, 76. The details about the Roman army given to the patriarch for the persecution seem very interesting. As noted by S. Harvey, Ephrem’s consecration as patriarch while he was *comes Orientis*, enabling him “to bring a military escort to his throne”, demonstrated a “close interaction and shared responsibility between high civil and ecclesiastical posts” (Harvey 1990a, 62).

<sup>63</sup> Brooks, ed. 1907, 66; Ghanem 1970, 76.

<sup>64</sup> Brooks, ed. 1907, 66, line 1; Ghanem 1970, 76.

<sup>65</sup> Brooks, ed. 1907, 66, line 4; Ghanem 1970, 76.

<sup>66</sup> Brooks, ed. 1907, 66, 73; Ghanem 1970, 73, 76.

to Elias, Ephrem falsely accused John of Tella of having made a lot of money performing ordinations<sup>67</sup>. As remarked by V. Menze, “that John had actually been accused of simony remains unlikely, but the question of the loyalty of non-Chalcedonians to a Chalcedonian emperor was probably in the air<sup>68</sup>”. Rebelling against the emperor must have figured in the charges against John<sup>69</sup> (see further). Throughout the narrative, Elias mentions several times that John of Tella was treated like a criminal<sup>70</sup>. It is probably not a coincidence that, according to Elias, Ephrem dispatched a certain Cometas: a “brigand’s strangler<sup>71</sup>” (in Ghanem’s translation), to supervise the operation. This title must correspond to the Greek “ληστοδιώκτης”: an official with the policing functions of keeping the roads safe and chasing robbers<sup>72</sup>. The fact that this official was engaged in the pursuit of John of Tella was probably due to John’s alleged criminal status, or, rather, the aim of presenting the popular bishop as a criminal to the local population<sup>73</sup>.

The Roman-Persian ecclesiastical/administrative/military communication and eventual collaboration in the arrest and extradition of John of Tella is quite notable. Justinian was aware of the planned operation<sup>74</sup>. There are no indications as to whether the marzban consulted on the matter with the central authorities; Elias’ description rather gives an impression that the joint operation was planned and executed at the local level<sup>75</sup>. According to Elias, the marzban agreed to get involved in the operation, sending an officer with the cavalry<sup>76</sup>. The Roman-Persian squad was accompanied by scouts<sup>77</sup> – also Roman and Persian – who knew the territory<sup>78</sup>, and by an interpreter<sup>79</sup>. Ephrem stayed on Roman territory, while marzban remained in Nisibis.

<sup>67</sup> Brooks, ed. 1907, 78; Ghanem 1970, 89-90.

<sup>68</sup> Menze 2008, 232.

<sup>69</sup> Brooks, ed. 1907, 68, 72-73; Ghanem 1970, 79, 84.

<sup>70</sup> Brooks, ed. 1907, 71, 72; Ghanem 1970, 81-81, 83.

<sup>71</sup> “ḥ[ā]nūqā d-lestāyē” Brooks, ed. 1907, 66, line 21; Ghanem 1970, 77 and note 215, p. 137.

<sup>72</sup> Farkas 2009, 465; Minnen 2013. Malalas mentions that a ληστοδιώκτης Rheges assisted the dux of Palestine, Asklepiades, in the suppression of a Samaritan rebel leader Justasas (Malal. 382) under Zeno. Severus of Antioch was himself assisted by a ληστοδιώκτης Conon (*PLRE-II*, s.u. Conon 6, 307-308) with the support of the emperor Anastasius (*PLRE-II*, s.u. Asiaticus, 164).

<sup>73</sup> Cf. the probably intentionally long journey from Nisibis to Antioch when John was brought from city to city heavily guarded so as to, as Elias comments, show him in that miserable state to the public (Brooks, ed. 1907, 86; Ghanem 1970, 98-99).

<sup>74</sup> According to Elias, Ephraem “informed the emperor of his astute plan and what he would do when he went down” (Brooks, ed. 1907, 65; Ghanem 1970, 76).

<sup>75</sup> Another remarkable feature is that Ephraem employed middlemen to communicate with the marzban: “found some people willing to serve his desire and sent them to the Marzban” (Ghanem 1970, 76; Brooks, ed. 1907, 66). Cf. the employment of middlemen for cross-border communication with a Persian marzban by the famous Roman defector Antoninus in the IV<sup>th</sup> century (Amm. Marc. 18.5.1 sq.; about this communication: Nechaeva 2014 b). Despite the almost two centuries of difference and different purposes of communication, some similarities can probably be observed.

<sup>76</sup> Brooks, ed. 1907, 66; Ghanem 1970, 76.

<sup>77</sup> Brooks, ed. 1907, 66, line 16; Ghanem 1970, 76.

<sup>78</sup> Brooks, ed. 1907, 66; Ghanem 1970, 76-77.

<sup>79</sup> Brooks, ed. 1907, 68, line 15; Ghanem 1970, 79.

The Roman-Persian joint search party departed from Nisibis, heading towards the Sinjar mountains, where John of Tella was soon discovered<sup>80</sup> and arrested<sup>81</sup>. Elias' descriptions of the circumstances of John's capture, as well as of the environment of the cold mountains during winter, are extremely detailed and picturesque. Not able to identify John, the persecutors first arrested the community of those living with him and harshly interrogated them<sup>82</sup>. When in the morning John was found in his cell (which was also searched) the Persian officer arrested him.

“What are you doing here<sup>83</sup>?” and “why do you rebel against your masters<sup>84</sup>?” were the two questions that the Persian officer asked John while arresting him<sup>85</sup>.

Once brought to Nisibis, John of Tella was locked in a cell, which was thoroughly guarded<sup>86</sup>. He was later handed over to the Romans and died on the 6th of February 538, after spending a year in imprisonment<sup>87</sup>.

**Denied hospitality: “Don't you know that this is another state?”**

According to Elias, before delivering the saint to the Romans, the marzban inquired about the accusations against John. Discovering, as Elias insists passim, the falsity of the accusations, he interrogated the bishop himself in the presence of “all the Grandees of the city and of all the chiefs of the troops<sup>88</sup>”. They talked through an interpreter who addressed John in Greek. Just like the Persian officer arresting John and his community in the mountains, the marzban Mihrdad asked John *why he was present on Persian territory and why he was rebelling against the emperor*.

Mihrdad:

How did you dare, a man such as you, to cross over to our country without our permit [“without us”<sup>89</sup>]? Don't you know that this is another State<sup>90</sup>?

John:

This is not the first time that I have crossed over to this land. It is rather the third time that I have passed over to pray with these saints who have already been living for many years in that mountain where you arrested me like a criminal. Who am I that your Lordship should know about me before I pass.

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<sup>80</sup> A Julianist monk living on the outskirts of the mountain brought the search party to John's dwelling (Brooks, ed. 1907, 67; Ghanem 1970, 77).

<sup>81</sup> Brooks, ed. 1907, 67-68; Ghanem 1970, 77-78.

<sup>82</sup> Brooks, ed. 1907, 68; Ghanem 1970, 78.

<sup>83</sup> Brooks, ed. 1907, 68, line 16; Ghanem 1970, 78.

<sup>84</sup> Brooks, ed. 1907, 68, line 19; Ghanem 1970, 79.

<sup>85</sup> Ghanem 1970, 78-79.

<sup>86</sup> Brooks, ed. 1907, 70; Ghanem 1970, 81.

<sup>87</sup> Brooks, ed. 1907, 74-95; Ghanem 1970, 85-110.

<sup>88</sup> Brooks, ed. 1907, 71; Ghanem 1970, 82.

<sup>89</sup> “men bel'dayn” Brooks, ed. 1907, 71, lines 24-25; Ghanem 1970, 82.

<sup>90</sup> Brooks, ed. 1907, 71, lines 24-26; Ghanem 1970, 82.

Further, today there is so much peace between the two kingdoms that I do not make a distinction between one State and the other. The two kings are brothers in love. Thus, whenever I am here, I feel I am in the Roman's territory, and whenever I am in the Roman's territory, I feel I am here because of the same peace<sup>91</sup>.

In my opinion this exchange is extremely important for understanding the functioning of the Roman-Persian border, the issues of cross-border mobility and the problems of the sustainability of such mobility and migration.

As mentioned above, northern Mesopotamia is often seen as having been a region with an "open" frontier, especially when Rome and Persia were not at war with each other. Judah Segal remarked that "it was never impossible or even difficult for the individual to cross the frontier<sup>92</sup>". Travelling across the border was, however, different from crossing the frontier and staying in the new territory. While a certain degree of uncontrolled mobility on the frontier could have been tolerated by the authorities on both sides, those doing the crossing were probably expected to have authorisation to stay on in the foreign territory. The questions about the reasons for John of Tella's presence on Persian territory asked by the Persian officials (both at the very moment of John's arrest and during the marzban's interrogation) contain exactly that reproach: the absence of permission from the Persian side<sup>93</sup>.

Furthermore, in the winter of 536/537, when the arrest of John took place, Rome and Persia were at peace, after the so-called Endless or Eternal Peace was concluded in 532. In his dialogue with the marzban, John of Tella refers to that state of peace between the states to justify his presence on Persian territory. However, as discussed, from an international point of view the condition of peace did not mean that the borders were open for free circulation. Rather, the opposite was the case (again, from the state and international points of view). Accordingly, from the moment of his arrest, John of Tella would have been liable to extradition should there be an official request to this end. Thus, in Elias' account, accused of disloyalty and of simony, there was a request to return the fugitive John of Tella from foreign territory.

The episodes of the interrogation of John by the Persian authorities, as they are described by Elias, reveal various layers of incrimination. From the Persian view, John of Tella was unlawfully present on Persian territory ("What are you doing here<sup>94</sup>?"; "How did you dare, a man such as you, to cross over to our country without our permit ["without us"]? Don't you know that this is another State<sup>95</sup>?"). Another point of accusation, probably featuring in the commission for John's arrest received by the Persians from the Romans, was that John was a rebel against the imperial authority ("Why do you rebel against your masters<sup>96</sup>?"; "Why did you rebel against Caesar and against those who have the authority in his land? Do not you know that those whoever rebel against his masters acts wrongfully<sup>97</sup>?"). The marzban also

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<sup>91</sup> Brooks, ed. 1907, 72, lines 6-12; Ghanem 1970, 83.

<sup>92</sup> Segal 1955, 127.

<sup>93</sup> Brooks, ed. 1907, 71, line 25.

<sup>94</sup> Brooks, ed. 1907, 68, line 16; Ghanem 1870, 78.

<sup>95</sup> Brooks, ed. 1907, 71, lines 24-25; Ghanem 1870, 82.

<sup>96</sup> Brooks, ed. 1907, 68, line 19; Ghanem 79.

<sup>97</sup> Brooks, ed. 1907, 72, line 24 and 73 lines 1-2; Ghanem 1970, 84.

alluded to the simony committed by John<sup>98</sup>. In Elias' version John convinced the Persians of his honesty and selflessness<sup>99</sup> and ardently claimed his full loyalty to the "victorious, peaceful, and merciful Emperor"<sup>100</sup>. However, as demonstrated above, John's alleged appeals to the international state of peace to justify his presence on Persian territory could have served only a rhetorical purpose.

Ephrem's communication with the Persian side, and his demand that they pursue John of Tella, can be interpreted as a request for the repatriation of a fugitive that was followed by an extradition operation<sup>101</sup>. This operation was performed by the local military administration, not at the supreme political level, as in other cases of extradition about which we are informed<sup>102</sup>.

It must have been relatively easy to identify and apprehend people or groups whose departure from the home country and/or whose presence in the hosting state was not desired: John of Tella was a prominent figure and information about his location was readily available.

The operation of John of Tella's arrest and direct extradition provide an interesting example of cross-border collaboration between religious and military authorities, and reveals unique details regarding the dynamics of cross-border interaction in VI<sup>th</sup> century Mesopotamia. Of strategic interest for both empires, the region of Mesopotamia was divided by the Roman-Persian state frontier but largely united culturally, allowing John of Tella to create his "frontier *politeia*". This flexible entity transcended the administrative frames of the empires and challenged their authorities: ecclesiastical, military, and political. These authorities cooperated to apprehend John of Tella. Thus, in order to neutralise the threat posed by the soft, meta-structural power of the ascetic community, the two states joined forces, overcoming the rigid political frames that separated them.

The episodes in this article tell stories of very different migrants: defecting and captive military officials, refugee aristocrats, and intellectual and religious dissidents. They embody different types of emigration: voluntary, constrained and forced.

The charitable reception of the seven philosophers at the Persian court and the lenient captivity of Mar Grigor in Constantinople in the early 530s demonstrate the highest level of "political hospitality". The prominent position of the migrants and, in particular, the personal involvement in their fates of the supreme leaders of Rome and Persia, placed the problems of their extradition / return at the supreme level of diplomacy. International regulations – which could not be dismissed by either the Romans or the Persians – required extradition, most likely mutual extradition. However, Chosroes and Justinian found ways to

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<sup>98</sup> Brooks, ed. 1907, 72, lines 12-13; Ghanem 1970, 83.

<sup>99</sup> Brooks, ed. 1907, 72; Ghanem 1970, 83.

<sup>100</sup> Brooks, ed. 1907, 73, line 4-5; Ghanem 1970, 84.

<sup>101</sup> Interpreted this way also by Ghanem 1970, 8-9.

<sup>102</sup> See Nechaeva 2017; Nechaeva 2016, 230-234.

extend their hospitality and duties as protectors by securing extra guarantees of protection through clauses within the Endless Peace Treaty.

The cases of Ildiges and Ustrigotthas show that different strategies could be applied for resolving the diplomatic-xenial contradiction, depending on the political situation, the balance of power between the partners and, in some cases, the local traditions. Justinian could afford to ignore Audoin's demand for the extradition of Ildiges, thus providing him with "political hospitality". The barbarian kings found themselves in a stalemate, having, on the one hand, to observe the internal customs, and, on the other hand, to conform to the universal framework of international diplomacy dictated by Rome and Persia to all the other satellite partners. The unavailability of any legitimate solution led to the application of backdoor, illicit methods.

The story of the extradition of John of Tella, in contrast to the other cases where foreign refugees were welcomed by the receiving state, represents a case of "political nonhospitality". John's presence on the foreign territory was clandestine and not supported by the Persian side. On the contrary, his proselytising activities must have troubled the local clergy – Zoroastrian, as well as those of the Persian Church of the East. Furthermore, John's alleged aspirations to convert the Lakhmid Arabs, who were Persian allies, might have disturbed the state authorities. The Sasanian state was probably not interested in supporting a community of foreign dissidents and troublemakers on its near-border territories. Nor was it worth straining relations with Rome. The receiving side was thus not eager to provide the protection of "political hospitality" for the refugee, treating his presence on Persian territory as illegal.

## Abbreviations

Mart. Grig. (2015a) : Jullien, F., éd. (2015a) : “Martyre de Mār Grigor, général en chef du roi Khusro Ier”, in : Jullien, éd. 2015a ; Jullien, F., transl., comm. (2015b) : “Martyre de Mār Grigor, général en chef du roi Khusro Ier”, in : Jullien, transl., comm., 2015b.

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