

SOTO CHICA, JOSÉ, *BIZANCIO Y LA PERSIA SASÁNIDA: DOS IMPERIOS FRENTE A FRENTE. UNA COMPARACIÓN MILITAR Y ECONÓMICA. 565-642*, GRANADA: CENTRO DE ESTUDIOS BIZANTINOS, NEOGRIEGOS Y CHIPRIOTAS, 2015, PP. 322, ISBN: 978-84-95905-61-1 (HBK)

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The volume delivers a fascinating study about both the military and economic aspects of the Byzantine and the Sasanian-Persian Empires that clashed between 564 CE and 642 CE. The book is structured in three different parts and aims to find out the impact of Justinian's *recuperatio* over the Byzantine economy and armed forces as well as a mirrored analysis of its Persian counterpart. In the first section ('La «*recuperatio*» y la Romania hacia 565. Un balance general', pp. 17-106), José Soto Chica begins his account from 565 CE, when both empires had completed their military expansion after the apparently endless wars against the Germanic peoples and the Hephthalites Huns. Subsequently, he proceeds with the description of how both empires were able to establish a solid authority that provided economic stimuli and a military strengthening, causing not only their renewal of political, legislative, and administrative structures, but also the quasi-simultaneous occupation of vast territories that sealed their power over their respective regions.

The author then draws a parallel between the *renovatio* and the *recuperatio* policies that both Justinian the Great and Khosrow I implemented, resulting in a clash over the Armenian, Mesopotamian, Lazic, Iberian, and Syriac territories; as can be seen on the second part, 'El gran rival: La Persia Sasánida' (pp. 183-243). The earlier conflict came to an end in 561 CE, when the Peace Treaty was signed, establishing the Roman-Persian boundaries. Soon after the peace, both empires experienced an economic and demographic boom that was followed by the necessary expansion of their influence over the bordering lands. There were two main consequences: on the one hand, Byzantium took over the Danube region, launching an offensive against the Maori tribe and some other areas near Persia; on the other, there was the military campaign led by Khosrow I that headed towards the Northwest lands of Yemen, some Turkish areas, and to some other regions that were of strategic importance around the Indian Ocean. These were the two main empires that were, in words of the author, the two eyes of the Ancient world.

Regarding the third and last part of his work ('Dos imperios frente a frente. Una comparación de los recursos militares, humanos y económicos de la Persia Sasánida con los de la Romanía', pp.255-259), José Soto Chica remarks the unquestionable role that the economic and demographic analysis plays in order to make the one-to-one comparison comprehensible. Both aspects have been essential to enable us to study their power at the end of the sixth and the first half of the seventh-century, especially through 572-591 CE and 603-628 CE. Thus the research has shed some light over the decline coinciding with the Arabs' prompt triumph over both of them. Furthermore, the author provides key figures from both empire's military forces after the Justinian period in Byzantium and during the years 558-573 CE in Khosrow's I reign. According to the testimonies we possess from recruits and from the financial data of the time, we are able to observe the scale of the development that both sides achieved. Although at first sight Byzantium seemed to have the more powerful armed forces, the author points out its scanty operative and combative capacity compared to the Persian army. This was better trained, even though the latter had a lower number of contingents.

As Soto Chica defends, understanding both empires' economic governance is absolutely essential in order to understand the last period of the Byzantium and Sasanian-Persian conflict. While Byzantium fought several wars across the Mediterranean, Persia did not have the same number of military exploits. As a result, the second were able to reinforce the Western boundaries and increase its political authority all over their Empire. These military triumphs were followed by territory expansion, changing their economic management. Byzantium, overwhelmed by the economic war effort, pursued a massive tax rise. On the contrary, the Sasanian Empire maintained a more conservative tax policy, because of its social structure. The Sasanian court and religious buildings were essential for the control of their own peoples. This was useful and helpful for the Imperial propaganda.

However, this apparently one sided situation ended around the first decades of seventh- century with the Great Roman-Persian War (603-628 CE) that drained all their resources. The Sasanians depleted half of their strength to pay off the cost of the war, causing them to use up the rest of the military and economic reserves. This war effort explained both the weak Byzantine defence at the battles of Ajnadayn, Yarmouk and Babylon; and the drastic end of the Sasanian Empire that began right after the military campaign of Heraclius. Subsequent social unrest and several civil wars from 628 to 638 CE ended up ruining the ambitious Persian project. Reaching to some concluding remarks, José Soto Chica places the fast Arab expansion as one of the causes of the Roman-Persian wars. Their ambition was their final downfall. The work ends with a summary table in which some data is discussed.

The outstanding contribution of the volume combines a detailed data analysis together with an intuitive narrative structure. The first and second parts cover the Byzantine and Persian military analysis, where José Soto Chica describes aspects like the organization of the troops, the strategy, the armament, the discipline, and the resources determined by both their geographic and economic context. In addition, the author includes a vast array of bibliographic resources, studies, and a table of contents – allowing the reader to grasp a more clear picture of the conflict. Above all, José Soto Chica not only sheds light on the general characteristics of both Empires and their mutual wars, but also on how two of the vastest forces of Antiquity contributed to the transition from the Ancient times to the Middle Ages.