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**THE “LIGHT, LAMPS, AND EYES” OF THE PERSIAN
EMPIRE AND THE GOTHIC KINGDOM
IN JUSTINIAN’S TIME: A NOTE ON PETER
THE PATRICIAN AND CASSIODORUS**

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Peter the Patrician (ca. 500–565), an Illyrian by origins, was among the most talented orators of the first half of the Sixth Century.¹ A lawyer in Constantinople, Peter’s career took a political turn under Justinian, who sent him several times to Italy on diplomatic missions after the year 534. During one of these missions, he was arrested by the order of King Theodahad, and was held prisoner until 539. Upon his return to Constantinople, Justinian rewarded him with an appointment as Master of the Offices, and also bestowed upon him the title of Patrician. Peter held his position at the court for the extraordinary term of twenty-six years, until Justinian’s death in 565.

We know that Peter was the author of three works, respectively: a) a *History* of the Roman Empire until Constantius II’s death, of which only a few fragments survive and in which he also used western sources;² b) a *History* of the *magisterium officiorum* from the reign of Constantine until the time of Justinian, excerpts of which survive in Constantine VII Porphyrogenitos *Liber de Cerimoniis* (Book I, chapters 84–95); c) an account of a mission to Persia in 561/2, on which he was sent to negotiate a peace agreement to end the twenty-year-long Lazic War. Procopius recognized in Peter the virtue of persuasion,³

¹ Cf. Claus 1980, 181–182; *PLRE* III, 994–998.

² For the question of the *Quellenforschung* see Bleckmann 1992.

³ Proc., *BG* 1,3,30: ἕνα μὲν ὄντα τῶν ἐν Βυζαντίῳ ῥητόρων, ἄλλως δὲ ξυνετόν τε καὶ

while John the Lydian described his personality and highlighted his good qualities in his role as Master of the Offices.⁴ The surviving fragments of his works clearly show a profile of a polished and cultured politician, who was also a talented rhetorician.

Among the few remaining fragments of Peter's *History*, the report of the negotiations of the peace treaty of the year 298 is especially important for scholars. It was in this year that the Grand Vizier Apharbān was sent as an ambassador to the Emperor Galerius by the Persian King Narsē:

“As Apharbān, who was a very close friend of the Persian king Narsē, had been sent as ambassador, *he approached Galerius in supplication*. When he had the opportunity to speak he said. ‘It is obvious for all mankind *that the Roman and the Persian Empires are just like two lamps; and it is necessary that, like eyes, the one is brightened by the light of the other and that they do not angrily strive for each other's destruction* (ὅτι ὡσπερανεὶ δύο λαμπτήρες εἰσιν ἢ τε Ῥωμαϊκὴ καὶ Περσικὴ βασιλεία· καὶ χρὴ καθάπερ ὀφθαλμοὺς τὴν ἑτέραν τῆ τῆς ἑτέρας κοσμεῖσθαι λαμπρότητι, καὶ μὴ πρὸς ἀναίρεσιν ἑαυτῶν ἀμοιβαδὸν μέχρι παντὸς χαλεπαίνειν). *For this is not held as a virtue but rather levity or weakness*. As they believe that later generations will not be able to help them they make an effort to destroy their opponents.’ He continued by saying that *it was not necessary to think that Narsē was weaker than the other kings but rather to see Galerius as that much superior to the other kings so that Narsē himself was inferior to him alone* (ἀλλὰ τοσοῦτον τῶν ἄλλων βασιλέων Γαλέριον ὑπερέχειν, ὥστε αὐτὸν τούτῳ μόνῳ δικαίως Ναρσαῖον ἡττηθῆσαι), and rightly so, without, however, proving to be lower in dignity than his ancestors. Apharbān added that Narsē had given him instructions to entrust, as they were fair, the right of his Empire to the kindness of the Romans...”⁵

Peter's fragment is the most important surviving source for the peace treaty of 298 between the Romans and the Sasanids. Dignas and Winter consider it likely that Peter used archival materials which gave him a deep understanding of the procedures of diplomacy in 298. However, they show justified reservations about the complete integrity of this document as a source for the treaty, remind-

πρᾶον καὶ ἐς τὸ πείθειν ἱκανῶς πεφυκότα. Nevertheless, in *Anecd.* 24,22–23 Procopius showed his hostility toward Peter.

⁴ John the Lydian provides a long detailed description in *de magistr.* 2,25–26, in which also: “He spares no time for idleness, spending his nights on books, his days on business... For him no time is free from concern with learning, with result that those who teach literature fear a meeting with him...” (transl. Carney 1971, 59).

⁵ Fragm. 13, Müller ed. FHG; transl. Dignas – Winter 2007, 122–123 (for the episode see 122–130); cf. also Canepa 2009, 122–130. For the historical context and the *Quellenforschung* cf. Bleckmann 1992, 141–147.

ing us that “we must bear in mind that his account is not a copy of the actual agreement but at best a commentary.”⁶ Canepa expresses similar doubts: “One cannot fix with certainty the exact date of most of these ideas, since many of the earlier techniques, attitudes, and imagery certainly guided later developments. Some later developments were possibly retrojected into accounts of earlier events;” Peter the Patrician’s fragment “could have shaped later diplomatic language, or historiography, or conversely could have been a retrojection of sixth-century conventions.”⁷ Peter may have used this metaphor in more than one circumstance during his very long activity as diplomat and as Master of the Offices. He may have used the lamps and eyes metaphor to introduce his speeches or the legates to the emperor. He may also have reworked the documents he found in the archives by embellishing them with a style which was more suitable for a literary work.

As scholars have pointed out, Peter’s metaphor, likening the two imperial powers to two eyes, as in the first part of the quotation, can be detected in Theophylact Simocatta’s introduction of the speech of Xusrō II addressed at the end of the Sixth Century to the Emperor Maurice in his attempt to ask him for an alliance:

“God effected that the whole world should be illuminated from the very beginning by two eyes, namely by the most powerful kingdom of the Romans and by the most prudent sceptre of the Persian state (δύο τισὶν ὀφθαλμοῖς τὸν κόσμον καταλάμπεσθαι πάντα ἄνωθεν καὶ ἐξ ἀρχῆς τὸ θεῖον ἐπραγματεύσατο, τοῦτ’ ἔστι τῇ δυνατωτάτῃ τῶν Ῥωμαίων βασιλείᾳ καὶ τοῖς ἐμφρονεστάτοις σκήπτροις τῆς Περσῶν πολιτείας). For by these greatest powers the disobedient and bellicose tribes are winnowed and man’s course is continually regulated and guided.”⁸

The unusual metaphor of the lights and eyes leads to the reasonable conclusion that Theophylact must here have based his wording on Peter the Patrician.⁹

While this fragment with its intriguing terminology has so far been considered by scholars in connection to the Roman and Persian Empires (although it clearly represents the view in Justinian’s time), the use of similar images as metaphors for imperial power also occurs in discussions of other imperial relations, namely, those

⁶ Dignas – Winter 2007, 122.

⁷ Canepa 2009, 122, who also expresses his position: “Peter’s access to sources and influence in later Byzantine political thought makes the former a stronger possibility than the latter.”

⁸ Theoph. Sim., 4,11,2–3; transl. Whitby – Whitby 1997, 117 with n. 40; Dignas – Winter 2007, 238 with n. 3. See also Mitchell 2007, 389–390. About the relationships between Romans and Persians as by Procopius cf. Börm 2007. On diplomacy and embassies between Roman and Persian Empires in Sixth Century cf. Diebler 1995.

⁹ Dignas – Winter 2007, 123 n. 20.

between Eastern Roman Empire and Ostrogothic Italy. In fact, we may find this terminology reflected in another source, this time concerning the relationships of Justinian's Empire with the Gothic Kingdom. In a letter written for an embassy sent to Justinian at the beginning of the Gothic war, Queen Gudeliva, Theodahad's wife, addresses Empress Theodora with the following words:

“You should consider, wisest of empresses, how urgently I desire to win your favour, which the lord my husband also wishes very zealously to obtain (*quantis cupiam nisibus gratiam vestram quaerere, quam etiam dominus iugalis meus magno studio desiderat optinere*). For, although this is dear to him in every way, to me, though, it is clearly of special importance, since the love of such a queen can so exalt me that I evidently find something superior to a kingdom. For what can be more welcome than to appear a sharer in the glory of your love? Since you shine out so profusely, make a willing loan to me from your own splendour, for light loses nothing when its radiance is lavished on another (*Quid enim gratius quam si gloriae vestrae videar caritatis participatione sociari, ut quia vos abunde fulgetis, nobis libenter de proprio splendore mutuemini, cum damnum non est lumini alteri de sua claritate largiri?*). Encourage my desires, which you know to be altogether sincere. Your favour should commend me in every realm. For you should make me bright, since I wish to shine from your lustre (*Debetis enim nos claros reddere, qui de vestra volumus luce fulgere*). Therefore, giving your serenity a reverent greeting, with affectionate daring I commend myself to your heart (*serenitati vestrae... affectuosa me animis vestris praesumptione commendo*). I hope that your marvellous wisdom may so order all things that the trust which your heart grants me will grow even fuller. For, although there should be no discord between the Roman realms (*cum nullam inter Romana regna deceat esse discordiam*), nonetheless an affair has arisen of a kind which should make me still dearer to your justice.”¹⁰

This document is published in the collection of the *Variae*, which consists of the official correspondence of the Gothic Kings written by Cassiodorus during his long activity at the palace as Quaestor, Master of the Offices, and Praetorian Prefect. The document belongs to a dossier of six letters written in the names of Theodahad and Gudeliva, and it was addressed to Justinian and Theodora during the turbulence between Empire and Kingdom as the events of the Gothic war were beginning to unfold. These six letters also contain references to an embassy in Italy of Peter, at the same time they announce embassies to Constantinople. Originally scholars related these letters to the peace negotiations between Theodahad and Justinian as described by Procopius, which probably happened at the beginning of

¹⁰ *Var.* 10,21 (T. Mommsen (ed.), *MGH AA XII*), transl. Barnish 1992, 138–139. Cf. Hodgkin 1886, 433–434; Rubin 1995, 87–88.

536.¹¹ But the general tendency is now to date the letters between May and October 535.¹² Rubin recognizes in them “die schärfere Tonart der Tage vor der Erklärung des „vertragslosen“ Zustandes durch Petros.”¹³ Peter and the legates from Italy were the deliverers of the three letters *Variae* 10,19–21,¹⁴ which scholars unanimously consider “Begleitschreiben” for the embassy. On the advice of Peter, Theodahad was trying to find a diplomatic way to maintain the peace with Justinian, which was not an easy task: the relations between them had become unbearably strained after the murder of Theodahad’s cousin Amalasuintha, for which crime Justinian blamed the Gothic king. A reference to this unpleasant event could hide behind the last sentence of the document, as well as in the other letters of the same group addressed to Theodora.¹⁵ This is not surprising. In fact, we know from Procopius’ *Anecdota* that it was Peter who, under the instigation of Theodora, convinced Theodahad to get rid of Amalasuintha, because Theodora was jealous of the Gothic Queen.¹⁶

If we compare the fragment of Peter with Cassiodorus’ letter, some interesting common elements can be detected. These common elements reflect the skill of these two highly regarded diplomats who, through long careers at the palace and as emissaries, were well versed in court ceremonial. To begin, both the documents are related to embassies – the first as a reconstruction of an historical account (which has been transmitted in the *Excerpta ex Petro Patricio de Legationibus Romanorum ad gentes*), the other as an official letter. Both the delegations were intended to obtain a peace and avoid a useless war, and the tone of supplication, of appeal to humanity and justice is quite similar: Apharbān “approached Galerius in supplication” and said among other things that the Empires “they do not angrily strive for each other’s destruction. For this is not held as a virtue but rather levity or weakness.” A tone of supplication is also present in the above quoted *Varia* 10,21, in addition to which we can also consider Theodahad’s words to Justinian in *Varia* 10,19, which was delivered on the same occasion:

¹¹ Proc., *BG* 1,6; these negotiations took place after Belisarius’ conquest of Sicily.

¹² For the dating see the different theories of Ginetti 1902; Leuthold 1908, 36–40; Körbs 1913, 21–22, 68–75; Sundwall 1919, 288–291; Bury 1923, 168 n. 1; Schwartz 1939; Stein 1949, 339–347; Krautschick 1983, 93–95; Rubin 1995, 85–95; *PLRE* III, 994–995; Vitiello 2005, 120–126; Kakridi 2005, 195–198.

¹³ Rubin 1995, 85–86.

¹⁴ Many scholars consider this a possibility; cf. *PLRE* III, 995.

¹⁵ *Var.* 10,21,2: *emersit tamen et qualitas rei, quae nos efficere cariores vestrae debeat aequitati* (cf. Bury 1923, 167; Barnish 1992, 139 n. 10). See in parallel the ambiguous words of Theodahad to Theodora in *Var.* 10,20,4: *nam de illa persona, de qua ad nos aliquid verbo titillante pervenit, hoc ordinatum esse cognoscite, quod vestris credidimus animis convenire*; cf. also the words addressed by Theodahad to Theodora in *Var.* 10,23,1, referring to Peter: *ut per eum disceremus acceptum vobis esse, quod in hac re publica constat evenisse*.

¹⁶ Proc., *Anec.* 16,1–6.

*Non enim rixas viles per regna requiritis: non vos iniusta certamina, quae sunt bonis moribus inimica, delectant, quia nihil aliud vos constat appetere, nisi quod opinionem vestram possit ornare. Quemadmodum enim pacem exorati poteritis abicere, quam pro ingenita pietate et iracundis gentibus consuestis inponere?*¹⁷

In both situations, the Empires, respectively of Diocletian and of Justinian, are presented as stronger than the other political bodies, the Persian and the Gothic Kingdoms. In Peter's fragment, Apharbān admits the inferiority of his ruler in front of the Emperor: "to see Galerius as that much superior to the other kings so that Narsē himself was inferior to him alone, and rightly so..." This makes the derivation of this text from an original document of the Persian chancery even more unlikely.¹⁸ This inferiority is also expressed in Theodahad's and Gudeliva's letters to the Emperor and to the Empress. However, the most striking conjunction is the metaphor of the light and the lamps. In the case of Apharbān this is used to introduce the message of King Narsē; in that of Gudeliva it serves to introduce the legate, who is the carrier of the letter and who would deliver the message orally.¹⁹ Cassiodorus expresses the metaphor as transmission of light from an Empress to a Queen who, being aware of her inferior status, was asking her for consent to rule (*si gloriae vestrae videar caritatis participatione sociari*) and in particular for permission to shine beside her as another light or as another "lamp": *nobis libenter de proprio splendore mutuemini, cum damnum non est lumini alteri de sua claritate largiri?... Debetis enim nos claros reddere, qui de vestra volumus luce fulgere.*²⁰ The relationship between the Empress and the Ostrogothic Queen is expressed through a well-built metaphor that makes use of an extensive complex terminology (*fulgere, splendor, lumen, claritas, lux*) in just a few lines, resting upon the metaphoric meaning of the word 'lumen' as widely found in the works of Latin authors.²¹ (The word *lumen* as here applied to Theodora was obviously a more appropriate choice than *luminar* or *lampas*.²²)

¹⁷ *Var.* 10,19,2: cf. also 10,22,1–2.

¹⁸ Different the interpretation of Canepa 2009, 128: "Peter's text has a markedly different tone from the empires' official histories and reflects the practical mechanics needed to maintain fraternal equilibrium in place of the official rhetoric of subordination."

¹⁹ *Var.* 10,19–24 were intended just to introduce the legates, who would deliver the messages orally: cf. *Var.* 10,22,3, 23,4, 24,2.

²⁰ See Hodgkin's 1886 translation, p. 434: "Shed on us the lustre of your glory, for one light loses nothing by imparting some of its brilliancy to another."

²¹ Cf. the several uses of the word 'lumen', among them the frequent one as 'lucerna', in Forcellini (Vol. III) 1940, 125–126; *ThLL* VII 2,2, Leipzig 1970–1979, 1810–1823, esp. 1811, 1815–1816. Cf. also Cic., *Cat.* 3,24: *lumina civitatis extincta sunt*.

²² Cassiodorus in the *Variae* uses often the words *lux* and *lumen*, while *luminaria* appears only in *Var.* 3,7,1 and with a technical meaning; very rare is also his use of *lampas*: cf. *Var.* 6,20, *de illius lampadis claritate lucere*, referring however to a magistracy.

This kind of metaphor has probably origins in the ancient symbolic description of the god as a light for the emperor, and in later times, of the emperor as a light for his subjects.²³ It also appears in the Patristic literature to express the relationships between the Sun-Christ and the Moon-Church. According to authors like Ambrose, Augustine, and the Church Fathers, just as the moon is illuminated by reflected sunlight, so also the Church is illuminated by Christ and shines from his reflected light.²⁴ Not by coincidence, this cosmic imagery has also deep roots in the Sasanian world, in which the king is “brother of the sun and the moon.” This tradition was at some point incorporated into the diplomatic literature regarding the Persian relationships with the Romans, generally in form of brotherhood between rulers.²⁵ A letter from Qobād I to Justinian as referenced by Malalas begins with the following form: “[Qobād], king of the kings, of the rising sun, to Flavius Justinian Caesar, of the setting moon.”²⁶ Peter the Patriarchian’s fragment is the result of all this imagery and ideology, and its language is an expression of Justinian’s political view, in which the metaphor of lights and lamps symbolizes the relationships between states.

In the letter of Gudeliva, which is the product of the Gothic court chancery, the metaphor of the light is used to symbolize the relationships between rulers. The metaphor apparently expresses the subservience of the Kingdom to the Empire, and its dependency: this tone is in keeping with the other letters of the group, which also refer to the political status of Gothic Italy.²⁷ However, in spite of the subservience the author suggests with this metaphor, Cassiodorus then goes on to use in the same document the expression *cum nullam inter Romana regna deceat esse discordiam*.²⁸ Here Justinian’s Empire is strangely defined as

²³ See for instance *Pan. Lat.* 4(8),5,3, referring to Constantius: *Sed neque Sol ipse neque cuncta sidera humanas res tam perpetuo lumine intuentur quam vos tuemini, qui sine ullo fere discrimine dierum ac noctium inlustratis orbem...*

²⁴ Cf. Ambrose, *In Hexamer.* 4,8,32 (CSEL XXXII 1): *fulget enim Ecclesia non suo sed Christi lumine et splendorem sibi accersit de sole iustitiae*. On this topic cf. Rahner 1964. I am grateful to Professor F. Troncarelli (Viterbo) for suggesting this comparison to me.

²⁵ Cf. Canepa 2009, 123–127, with the examples listed, in which also, p. 124: “According to their native formulations, the Sasanian sovereign was “brother of the sun and moon,” and the Roman emperors were elemental forces implicated into the very fabric of the *kosmos*, their commands “not confined by the earthly boundaries but reach[ing] the heavens”.”

²⁶ Malal., *Chron.* 50,18 (B.G. Niebuhr ed., Bonn 1831 [*Corpus Scrip. Hist. Byz.*]), p. 449.

²⁷ Cf. below, n. 28, also *Var.* 10,22,2 and 10,2,3.

²⁸ A similar concept is also in the first letter of the collection of the *Variae*, which dates to 508 and is addressed by Theoderic to Emperor Anastasius, *Var.* 1,1,4–5: *quia pati vos non credimus inter utrasque res publicas, quarum semper unum corpus sub antiquis principibus fuisse declaratur, aliquid discordiae permanere. Quas... oportet inter se... coniungi... Romani regni unum velle, una semper opinio sit*. See also Theodahad’s letter to Theodora, *Var.* 10,23,1: *nunc est potius quod regna coniungat promissio fixa et votiva concordia*, in parallel to *Var.* 1,1,2: *ut concordiam vestram quaerere debeamus*; also *Var.* 10,32,4, of Witigis to Justinian: *quatinus utraeque res publi-*

regnum in the same way as the Gothic Kingdom. Although this expression made sense in the Roman/Persian protocol, it is out of place in the diplomacy between Empire and Ostrogothic Italy. A similar lack of hierarchical distinction occurs in another letter of the group, in which Theodahad declares to Theodora: *nunc est potius quod regna coniungat promissio fixa et votiva concordia*.²⁹ In his recent book, Giardina notices that this anomaly of the use of *regnum*³⁰ occurs only in letters written for Theodahad to identify Justinian's Empire.³¹ An important confirmation of such a use is in the lines of a poem of Maximianus. He would remember his experience as an emissary in the East with similar words: *Missus ad Eoas legati munere partes / tranquillum cunctis nectere pacis opus, / dum studeo gemini componere foedera regni...* (The terminology of these lines can be also found in the final section concerning the sexual metaphor called "*laus mentulae*," referring to the conjunction of two bodies: *haec geminas tanto constringit foedere mentes, / unius ut faciat corporis esse duo*.)³² Significantly, Maximianus was Theodahad's legate in those years, and it is not impossible that he delivered the above mentioned letters in 535.³³

Even more significant for this investigation, is that both the documents are connected to Peter the Patrician. In fact, if the first evidence comes from a fragment of one of his lost works, Cassiodorus' letters were written for an embassy sent to Justinian as response to the message delivered to his king by Peter, who returned to Constantinople together with the Western legates and Cassiodorus' letters to deliver. Peter is mentioned in the whole collection of the *Variae* only in this group of letters, which refer to two different delegations of those years. In these letters Cassiodorus eulogized Peter for being *eloquentissimus, doctrina summus, sapientissimus*.³⁴

cae restaurata concordia perseverent et quod temporibus retro principum laudabili opinione fundatum est, sub vestro magis imperio divinis auxiliis augeatur. Jordanes, *Rom.* 375, according to which Justinian *duo regna duasque res publicas suae ditioni subegit*.

²⁹ *Var.* 10,23,1, also quoted above, at n. 28.

³⁰ Cf. Giardina 2006, 133–134 with n. 87–88 (in which see also the related bibliography).

³¹ Cf. Giardina as above, n. 30; the references are *Var.* 10,23,1 and 3, 10,25,1 (also 10,19,2 [quoted above in text]), while in 10,19,3 the expression should clearly be understood as *plurale pro singulari: diligere quidem, piissime imperator; in propriis regnis: sed quanto praestantius est, ut in Italiae partibus plus ameris, unde nomen Romanum per orbem terrarum constat esse diffusum!* Cf. in parallel the same use of expressions *ad Eoas partes* and *gemini foedera regni* as by Maximianus, *Eleg.* 5,1–3 (quoted in text).

³² *Eleg.* 5,1–3 and 115–116 (cf. also above, n. 31); cf. Vitiello 2006, 188–190 with n. 28.

³³ For the possible identification of Maximianus with one of the legates of 535 cf. Mastrandrea 2005.

³⁴ His name appears almost in all the six letters of the group; *Var.* 10,19,4: *vir eloquentissimus Petrus... et doctrina summus et conscientiae claritate praecipuus*; 10,20,2: *talem virum... qualem et tanta gloria debuit mittere et vestra decet obsequia retinere*; 10,22,1: *virum disertis-*

Peter is a key to understand the diplomacy between the Italic Kingdom and the Empire of Justinian in this particular situation. According to Procopius’ *Anecdota*, his real goal in Italy was to accomplish Theodora’s plans to get rid of Amalasuintha by convincing Theodahad to have her assassinated (see above). It is important that the letter of Gudeliva discussed above is directly addressed to Theodora. The Empress is addressee of four of the six letters of the group *Variae* 10,19–24, and of one earlier letter of Amalasuintha.³⁵ Gudeliva’s words at the beginning of the letter are striking, as she attempts to win Theodora’s favour for herself and her husband: “You should consider, wisest of empresses, how urgently I desire to win your favour, which the lord my husband also wishes very zealously to obtain.”³⁶ We understand from the two letters addressed to Theodora by Theodahad that she had asked him to bring first to her attention any matters of diplomacy concerning Justinian.³⁷ Theodora’s interference in political matters is well testified in the affairs in Italy. Her name is mentioned in the biographies of the *Liber Pontificalis* as the sender of letters containing orders to be delivered to two Roman Popes.³⁸ Finally, in the *Constitutio Pragmatica* of the year 554, which postdates Theodora’s death, Justinian ordered that all policies relating to Italy which had been previously issued by him and his wife should be maintained.³⁹ The importance of all this evidence is clear. Theodora’s behavior in the diplomatic situation of Italy sheds light on the contemporary sources referring to the relationship between the Empress and the Persian Kings. We know from Malalas that she created an exchange of gifts with the chief wife of the Persian King which paralleled that of Justinian with the King, using the protocol that existed between Emperor and King as a model.⁴⁰ Procopius in the *Anecdota*

simum Petrum; 10,23,1: *virum eloquentissimum Petrum et, quod est ipsis dignitatibus honorabilis, vestris obsequiis inhaerentem*; 10,24,1: *viro sapientissimo Petro*.

³⁵ *Var.* 10,10: *Cum propositi nostri sit illa quaerere quae probantur ad gloriam pii principis pertinere, dignum est vos sermone venerari, quos bonis omnibus constat semper augeri... Atque ideo reddens Augustae reverentiae salutationis affectum spero, ut redeuntibus legatis nostris, quos ad clementissimum et gloriosissimum principem destinavimus, de vestra nos faciatis sospitate gaudere, quia prospera vestra ita nobis grata videntur ut propria et necesse est sospitatem desideranter suscipere, quam nos iugiter constat optare.*

³⁶ *Var.* 10,21,1, quoted above in text.

³⁷ Cf. *Var.* 10,20,2: *Hortamini enim ut quicquid expetendum a triumphali principe domno iugali vestro credimus, vestris ante sensibus ingeramus*; and 10,23,2–4. Theodora’s influence in Justinian decision is testified by Procopius, *Anec.* 13,19, and 10,13; cf. also *Anec.* 2,32–35, Theodora’s letter to Xusrō I.

³⁸ Cf. *Liber Pontificalis* 60,6–9 and 61, 3–6.

³⁹ *Nov. Just., App.* 7,1: *sed et ea quae a nobis vel a pia memoriae Theodora Augusta quondam coniuge nostra conlata sunt, volumus illibata servari.*

⁴⁰ Cf. Malal. *Chron.* 50,18 (Niebuhr ed.), p. 467, on which Canepa 2009, 155–156; see also Kaldellis 2004, 142–150 (“The Rule of Women and the Plan of the Secret History”).

also writes that she sent letters to Qobād I demanding the *proskynēsis* from the Sasanian envoys, the same which diplomatic protocol required for Justinian. From this same work, we know that Xusrō I despised Theodora's desire to elevate her position.⁴¹ All this evidence shows Theodora's interference in political matters but also her ambitions to be honoured in the court ceremonial at the same level as her husband. This seems clear not only in diplomatic relationships with the Persian Empire, but also with the Italic Kingdom.

If Peter is a possible conjunction between the documents considered above, how can we explain the coincidences? Should we think that the metaphor of light, lamps and eyes was a piece of Peter's *eloquentia* during his long activity as ambassador and as Master of the Offices of Justinian? In this case, we could assume that in his answer to Justinian and Theodora, Cassiodorus was inspired by Peter's rhetoric, and that he used a coded language which was pleasing to Justinian's and Theodora's ambitions. But the use of the term *regna* to identify both the Empire and the Kingdom makes this hypothesis unlikely – although this would fit with the idea of the two kingdoms in Roman/Persian diplomacy. Moreover, Peter was still at the beginning of his political activity when Justinian sent him to Italy in 534, while his account on the Persian treaty of the year 298 was probably composed between 552 and 563. We also know that he had the tendency in his diplomatic missions to position himself in the center of events, and to present himself as one whose political skill was imperative for solving big international problems. Procopius, in his account of the negotiations with Theodahad, remarks on Peter's self-aggrandizing tendencies,⁴² and later, Menander Protector, who referenced Peter's account of his diplomatic mission to Persia in 561/2, noted the way he exaggerated his role in that circumstance: "Peter, for the sake of his own reputation, has placed somewhat too much emphasis upon himself, in order that he appears to posterity as a very effective and convincing speaker who was able to bring around the unyielding and arrogant spirits of the barbarians."⁴³ On this basis, we cannot dismiss the possibility that Cassiodorus, who also was highly regarded at the court for his abilities as an orator,⁴⁴ had used the metaphors of light, lamps and eyes, and that Peter subsequently reused it in his writing and possibly during his long activity as Master of the Offices; after all, one of the duties of this magistrate was to introduce the delegations to the

⁴¹ Cf. Proc., *Anec.* 30,24–25 and 2,29–33, on which Canepa 2009, 156: "Despite Procopius's outraged conservative sensibilities, it is likely that these were just informal or short-lived innovations, as we hear no more of this practice after Theodora's death."

⁴² Cf. the detailed description in Proc., *BG* 1,6.

⁴³ *Fragm.* 6.2, transl. Rapp 2005, 390.

⁴⁴ Cf. for example *Anec. Hold.*, ll.15–18; *Var.* 9,25,2 and 9,24,2–3; fragments of his panegyrics are published by L. Traube in *MGH AA XII*.

Emperor.⁴⁵ It is in fact worth noting that Cassiodorus had already used a quite similar metaphor a few months before he met Peter in Italy. Around the end of the year 534, he introduced the co-regency of Amalasuintha and the new elected King Theodahad to the Roman Senate with the following words:

“With God’s favour, I [i.e. Amalasuintha] have chosen as partner in my realm the most fortunate Theodahad. Thus I, who previously bore the burden of the state in solitary cogitation, may now pursue the good of all with united counsels, so that we who are two in our processes of thought may seem one person on our conclusions. The very stars of heaven are governed by mutual help, and order the world with their light by sharing and exchanging toil (*Astra ipsa caeli mutuo reguntur auxilio et vicario labore participata mundum suis luminibus amministrant*). Furthermore, Providence has given man himself two hands, a pair of ears, twin eyes (*Ipsi quoque homini duplices manus, socias aures, oculos geminos divina tribuerunt*), that the work accomplished by two partners may be done more effectively.”⁴⁶

(Cf. the above considered cosmic imagery of the sun and the moon in the West and in the Sasanian world; also the words of Peter: “it is necessary that, like eyes, the one is brightened by the light of the other,” finally Theophylact Simocatta: “God effected that the whole world should be illuminated from the very beginning by two eyes.”) On the same occasion, writing in Theodahad’s name, Cassiodorus used a similar metaphor: *quae* [i.e. Amalasuintha] *magnitudinem imperii sui nostra voluit participatione roborari, ut tamquam in duobus luminibus unus esset aspectus et concordem sensum nemo crederet segregatum*.⁴⁷

These words do not represent the solution of the problem, which may lie in the middle. When he first came to Italy and met Cassiodorus, Peter was at the first steps of his long career as a politician. Cassiodorus, who was probably about fifteen years older than him, was almost at the end of his similarly long experience at the Gothic court. He always acknowledged the central position of the Empire in his writings in name of the kings.⁴⁸ This could make his rhetoric very easy to reuse to praise an emperor. But of course both the very literate Cassiodorus and Peter are debtors in their writings to several authors,

⁴⁵ Cf. *Var.* 6,2–4, in which: *Per eum* [i.e. *magistrum officiorum*] *senator veniens nostris praesentatur obtutibus: ammonet trepidum, componit loquentem, sua quin etiam verba solet inserere, ut nos decenter omnia debeamus audire*; and *Var.* 10,33. Cf. also Clauss 1980, 63–72; Diebler 1995, esp. 211–216.

⁴⁶ *Var.* 10,3,2, transl. Barnish 1992, 131.

⁴⁷ *Var.* 10,4,2; see also 7,9,2: *Duo quippe Tiberini alvei meatus ornatissimas civitates tamquam duo lumina susceperunt, ne vacaret a gratia quod tantae urbi ministrabat expensas*.

⁴⁸ For some example see above at n. 28.

including the classics.⁴⁹ Even so, the similarities in their usage of this metaphor as a way to symbolize the Roman Empire are striking, and in light of their connections they may not be coincidental.

The collapse soon of the Gothic Kingdom, later of the Persian Empire, would definitively turn off the two lamps that, even in those turbulent times, were still burning together with the Eastern Roman Empire. This provoked, to conclude the game of metaphors in an old-fashioned way, the beginning of the Dark Age.

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⁴⁹ See for instance at the end of Peter's fragm. 13 the reference to the Virgilian principle *parcere subiectis et debellare superbos*.

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Abstract

A fragment from the lost History of Peter the Patrician is the most important surviving source for the peace treaty of 298 between the Romans and the Sasanids, and scholars have acknowledged the influence of this piece on the later work of Theophylact Simocatta. This essay explores Peter’s use of images of power, particularly the “lamps, lights and eyes” as a metaphor for imperial rule, considering them together with similar uses of the same imagery by Cassiodorus. In some of his letters for the Ostrogothic Kings, Cassiodorus used strikingly similar images to describe the relations between Empire and Kingdom, and between rulers, particularly Theodora and Gudeliva. By examining these works in their larger context, nuances of meaning in Sixth Century diplomacy can be discerned, revealing that while the ultimate source of the “lamps, lights, and eyes” cannot be stated with certainty, the use of this image to symbolize power reflected the authors’ efforts to represent relations between Empires and Kingdoms (Roman/Persian and Byzantine/Italic) in ways that were useful as diplomacy and especially as propaganda, as well as symbolically important. They also may hide Theodora’s ambitions to hold power equal to that of her husband, as testified by other contemporary authors.