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* The Code of Research Ethics of the International
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Bāb al-Sūls (Sūl–Gates) in Caucasia and Turkestan, Their Roles in Medieval Caucasian and Turkestan Studies, and the Sūl Turks

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Abstract: During the history, the nomadic peoples tried to enter to Anatolia and Persia through some passages from the west and east of the Caspian Sea. In the periods of BC and the Middle Ages, the Darial pass which is a western part of those gates and also known as “gates of the Alans”, was used for invasions into Anatolia. And the second, Darband takes place on the western seaside of the Caspian Sea, and for this reason, is known as “Caspian gates” and used for the nomadic invasions from the north into Persia. However, the nomads used to also the Gurgan gates east of the Caspian Sea. The nations in Anatolia and Persia named the gates according to the names of those peoples invaded the region because the nomads made attacks from either side of the Caspian Sea, and sometimes were relative with themselves. Or, they named the gates after the name of Aleksander the Great who had made campaigns to the East. One of those peoples are Sul Turks, who converted first into Islam, and some passages in the region are named after their name.

Keywords: Darial, Darband, Alexander the Great, Caucasus, Sasanians, Sul Turks.

1. Introduction

The gate known as the “*Darband Pass*” is mentioned particularly in reference to the incursions of the Alans, the Huns and the Khazars. Before the Huns, the major nomadic threat in Northern Caucasia was the Alans in the West and the Albanians in the East. According to the statement of Josephus Flavius (38-100 A.D.), the Alans were using not only the Darial (*Dar-i Alān* = Alan Gate) pass but also Darband, namely the passes on the western coastline of the Caspian Sea while they were heading for the south in their incursions. Although it is not exactly known when the Huns first arrived in the Caucasia, the available sources reveal some information regarding the fact that nomadic tribes arrived in this region from the 2nd and 1st centuries B.C. However, it is acknowledged that the Huns began to appear in the Caucasia before the 2nd century A.D., and the Darband pass was called as the “*Pass of the Huns*” in the 4th century. In the 5th century, Hun groups emerged in the north-east borders of Iran as well as in the north-west coastline and the south of the Caspian Sea as the most powerful enemy of the Sasanian Empire in Iran. In order to take measures, the Sasanian Empire began to make fortifications built in both regions and sometimes built fortified cities such as Chor. The Sasanians were exposed to the attacks of the Sabirs in the west of the Caspian Sea, and of their ruler the (Gok)-Turks in the east of the Caspian Sea from 516/517 on. The Sabirs were later replaced by the Khazars who gave their name to both the Caspian Sea and the Darband pass. In 585, Johannes of Ephesus, and later Bar Hebraeus and Michael the Syrian named the city of “*Caspia*” as the “*Gate of the Turks*”, and the historian Bel’amî named Darband as

Darband of the Khazars (Hudud al-‘Alam, 1937, p. 145, 454; Esin 1979: 35; Gadjeiev 2000: 69). These Khazar raids proceeded until the wars of the Khazars with the Islamic armies, which headed for the Caucasia after their conquest of Iran in the middle of the 7th century.

Islamic armies started their first attacks in the Darband region (*Al-Bāb*) towards the Caucasian lands in 642-643. In 713-714, Maslama ibn Abd al-Malik launched an attack to the frontiers of the Khazaria. Djarrah ibn Abd Allah proceeded as far as Balanjar after crossing *Bāb*; yet Darband still continued to be a border city between the Muslim Arabs and the Khazars. The Khazars used the Darband valley when they were proceeding to the south of Caucasia, and the Arabs sometimes used Darband especially when they were heading to the “heart” of the Khazar Kaganate, and the Darial pass on their route to conduct a manoeuvre to encircle the Dagestan. In 731-732 Maslama proceeded as far as *Al-Bāb*, but apparently Darband later passed into the hands of the Khazars again (see Golden, 1980, pp. 62-63), since the Khazars launched an attack again from *Al-Bāb* towards the south in 799. As the northern gates of *Al-Bāb* opened to the Khazar city, they were constantly kept closed by the Muslims (Esin, 1979, p. 37-38). The Khazars made a great endeavor in the Caucasia to prevent the Islamic armies from crossing to the north of the Caucasian passes, and finally succeeded to stop the Arab armies around Darband before they proceeded further to the north. But after the conquest of Darband in the 8th century, the Darband as an Islamic city and border gate was ruled by Muslim governors.

2. The Caucasian Fortifications and Passes

Chor and Darband are among the first significant and fortified cities founded in Caucasia to stop nomadic invasions. Although the city of Chor, which was built in an area close to Darband, is mentioned under different names in the sources, the name was adopted as *Sūl* in the Islamic period. It is observed that *Chor* was used as a tribe name in various Turkish clans, also among the Kipchaks, and the name *Chor* was given to several places in the region.

There were two important passes used by the nomadic tribes on their migration route from north to south throughout history; one of these is Darial, and the other one is the Darband pass situated close to the coastline of the Caspian Sea and accepted as the passage point of nomadic tribes due to its more frequent use than the other. According to the sources, beginning from the reign of Yazdagird II (438-457) the Sasanians had to make defense walls and fortresses built in the Caucasian front as well as in the Gorgan region in the east of the Caspian Sea against nomadic attacks (Esin, 1979, p. 34, 43).

Khosraw I (531-579) is the leading emperor who the most actively took action about this matter. He made walls built in Iran, not only in a single place but all around Iran. One of these walls was built along the Gorgan plateau in the north-east boundary against the Hephthalites, one was built in the Caucasian passes together with the Darial fortification (*qal'at Bāb al-Lān*) in the north-west, one was located in the south-east, and one was built in the south-west of Iran and named as the “Arab wall”.

2.1. Darial (*Dar-i Alān*) Pass

As the Darial Pass received its name from the Alans who carried out invasions from the Northern Caucasia to the south as from the beginnings of the 1st century A.D., it was named as *Dar-i Alān* in Persian or later as *Bāb al-Lān* in Arabic (Dunlop, 1986b, p. 837). For the Darial pass, Tacitus (ca. 55/56-115/120 A.D.) uses the word ‘*Sarmat*’ while giving us the first information about the Alans. He uses the expression “*Caspia via*” (or *Caucasiae Portae*) in reference to the Darial Pass. In his *Geographika*, Ptolemy refers to Darial, namely the later “*Alan gate*”, when he writes “*Sarmat Pass*”, and to the “*Darband Gate*” when he writes “*Albanian Pass*” (Alemany, 2000, p. 24).

2.2. Chol /Chor (Desert?) / Sūl / Hun / Bāb al-Abwāb (Darband) Pass

Darband is a settlement on the western coast of the Caspian Sea, situated between the Sea and the Caspian skirts, next to the narrow pass 3-3.5 m. in width (see Kettenhofen, 1996, available at www.iranica.com). Darband Pass was named as *Al-Bāb al-Abwāb* in Islamic sources, sometimes as *Al-Bāb wal-Abwāb*, mostly as *Al-Bāb* in its brief form (see Dunlop, 1986, p. 837; Golden, 1992, p. 140). During the Sasanians, in the 6th century A.D., the kings made the fortifications of Darband built, wishing to make safe the northern frontiers. According to the account of Gadjiev, beginning from Darband fortress, walls are 12 m. in high and 1.8-2.4 m in wide, while the high of the walls of fortress in the Darband is about 12-15 m.¹

¹ For a description of Darband city and the wall, see Gadjiev 2001, p. 357.

As the founder of the city, it is mentioned the names of Hosraw I (531-579), Kawad I (488-531) and Peroz in the Persian and Arabic sources. But, Gewond, Armenian source, mentions the name of the Byzantine emperor Marcianus (451-457) (Lewond, 1982, p. 69, 170-171). Studied the Darband wall archaeologically, Gadjiev dates it to the 6th century A.D. (Gadžiev, 2001, p. 357-360).

Even though it is mentioned under various names such as *Tzour* and *Chor* in Greek and Armenian sources from the 4th century A.D., its name began to be mentioned frequently from the 7th century onwards as a consequence of the interest the Islamic geographers took in the region during the activities carried on by the Islamic armies especially against the Khazars. As for the appearance of the name *Chor* in the form of *Chol*, it is possible to spell it as both *Chor* and *Chol* because the graphemes *l* and *r* are inscribed by the same sign in Middle Persian. Therefore, it is natural to come across both spellings in the Caucasian languages which were under the influence of Iranian culture (See Gadjiev, 2000, p. 65). The name *Tzour* / *Chor* / *Cog* was later transformed into *Sûl* in the Arabic language. Due to the adoption of the name *Chor* in the Arabic language as *Sûl*, this pass was referred to also as *Bâb al-Sûl*. In the work *Darband-nameh* it is narrated that after conquering this region and the city Darband, Kobad shah here had the great wall of Darband built. According to one story it was built by Hosraw Anosherwan (Minorskiy, 1963, p. 190), but another one by Iskandar-i Zulkarnayn (*Darband-nâme*, 1851, p.10, 14, 16-20, 194-197). The old name “*Chor*” was changed into the Arabic “*Sûl*” in the Darband chronicle *Ta’rikh al-Bâb* (12th c.) and it was used to express a certain part of Darband, and thus the

Sūl Castle was distinguished from the Darband Castle (Gadjiev, 2000, p. 71).

Both the recent archaeological researches carried out in the Darband region and the interpretations made from the point of view of historical sources demonstrate that the Darband pass and Chor / Sūl gate were probably different although they were close to each other. The Armenian sources occasionally mention a “*pass / gate of the Huns*” while narrating the southern attacks of the Huns in the north of Darband in the 4th-5th centuries A.D. (see Sebeos, 1999, p. 148 and n. 910). There are two different views regarding the whereabouts of this “*gate of the Huns*”: some connect it to Darband in further north, while others associate *the pass of the Huns* with the Chor gate due to the reason that Chor /Sūls were considered to be the same tribe with the Huns. On the other hand, there are studies demonstrating that the Chor gate may be situated in the Darband region (see Hewsen, 1992, p. 56A, Map 7).

However, in the epigraphs of Shapur I and of the religious leader Kartir there are also references to the Darband Pass. Since Darband pass is situated in Caucasian Albania, it is named as “*Albanian gates*” in those inscriptions (Gadjiev, 2000, p. 65).² During the first Arabian incursions to the territories in the north of Caucasian Mountains and their wars against the Khazarian Turks in the north in the 7th and 8th centuries, some of the Islamic writers referred to the city of Darband as *Al-Bāb*, and the gate / pass there as *Al-Bāb al-Albāb* or sometimes as *Bāb al-Sūl*. According to the opinion of J. Marquart, there were “*Sūl (Chor) (Turks)*” in the western part of the Caspian Sea just like in Dahistan in the north of Gorgan, and both “*Hun*” groups were probably one and the same tribe,

² For the text of the inscription, see Maricq, 1965, p. 78(*13), 93-94.

albeit with a difference: the word in the west was probably assumed to be of Iranian origin and he took it from *Chor* depending also on the Armenian sources, while he named the word in the east as “*desert*”, namely “*waste land*”, considering it of Turkish origin and distinguished the two *Sūls* from one another (See Marquart, 1901, p. 100-103; Esin, 1979, p. 40). M. Gadjeiev is one of the researchers who accept that the name *Chol* / *Chor* is etymologically Persian, and distinguish it from the Turkish *Chol* (<Desert > in Arabic sources: *Sūl*) used in the east of the Caspian Sea.

During the reign of the Seljukid Empire, the Sultan Alp Arslan came to Darband in 1067 and assigned the area to the Turkish commander Saw Tegin; as from this date, Darband passed into the hands of the Oghuz. In the aftermath of this development, various Turkish dynasties were established in this region, and thereby, in the words of E. Esin, “*the city of ‘Sūl’ in Darband, one of the two Turkish centers under the name ‘Sūl’ which were introduced to the religion of Islam, became an Islamic Turkish center as a consequence of the incursions of Oghuz Turks in the Islamic period*” (Esin, 1979, p. 39).

3. *Sūl* Turks in the Trans-Caspian

Proceeded to the north-east borders of the Caspian Sea the Hun groups were later begun to be called as the “*White Huns*” in Western literature. Even in the period of Parthians, cities of Dahistan and Gorgan (*Jurjān* in Arabic) in the steppes between the Caspian Sea and Aral Lake were inhabited by several nomadic groups; and some of these groups

penetrated even into the Khorasan region, and the region was used to be called *Aparshahr* until it was named as *Khorasan* by the Sasanians. Armenian sources reveal that the Huns invaded several places in Iran down to the south of the Caspian Sea. We learn especially from the Armenian sources that nomadic incursions proceeded to the east of the Caspian Sea in the period of the Hephthalite Empire in the 5th century after the reign of *White Huns*, and they even conducted raids to the inner lands of Iran and intervened with the domestic affairs of the Sasanians.

Islamic sources mention the existence of a community called *Sūl* settled in Dahistan (Desert Land) and in the north of the area referred to as *Jurjān* in Arabic sources; it is possible that this community had been living there since the 4th century. The *Sūl* dynasty was the descendants of the Turks, probably of Oghuz Turks, because it is narrated in all the Islamic sources belonging to the 10th century that the region between the north and east of the Caspian Sea and Syr-Daria was inhabited by Oghuz Turks (*Guzz*). It is also stated in the work *Hudūd al-Ālam* that Gorgan and Dahistan regions were within the boundaries of the Oghuz (See Esin, 1979, p. 41). At the beginning of the 8th century, *Sūl Tigin* was commanding these Turks, who were still beyond the reach of the Islamic armies and had not been converted to Islam yet, and were probably practicing the religion of Zoroastrianism. It has been mentioned above that some of the leading commanders in this population was assigned to the office of governorship or deputy governorship in the Islamic cities in the west of the Caspian Sea.

However, Islamic sources also mention another gate there as *Bāb al-Sūl* because we know that at that time the *Sūl* Turks lived there in the regions of Gorgan and Dahistan under the rule of *Sūl Tigin*. The *Sūl*

Turks were there from the 4th and 5th century on. The region where the Sûl Turks inhabited in these centuries was surrounded by “*the Caspian Sea in the west, Big Balkhan Mountains in the north, Kara-Kum Desert and Kuren and Kopet Mountains in the east, and Etrek / Atrak River in the south*”; their capital, according to Marquart, was a city referred to as *Balkhān* (in Arabic), *Balaam* (in Greek) and *Bolo* (in Chinese). The city was situated at today’s Kizil-Su gulf, the meeting place where Amu-Daria flows to the Caspian Sea through its old route Uzboy.

The city of Jurjān was ruled by Rzbān ibn Rzbān from the Sûl dynasty at the time when the Islamic armies arrived in the city at the command of Suwayd ibn Mukarrin. Rzban signed an agreement with the Omayyads in 639, and gained the right of religious freedom for non-Muslims on behalf of Dahistan and Gorgan people. The Omayyad governors travelling from Azarbaidjan to Khorasan were occasionally intercepted by the Sûl Turks, and peace was broken. Thereupon, the Khorasan governor Yazid ibn Muhallab arrived in the region in 716 to wage a war against the Sûl Turks and to conquer Gorgan and Dahistan. Dahistan was ruled by Sûl, and Gorgan was ruled by Fīrūz ibn Kūl probably from the same dynasty. The capital of Sûl was named as *Dahistan*. Sûl had a fortress on an island or peninsula called “*Buhaira*” that was 28 kms away from the city of Dahistan. The capital of Fīrūz was situated on the river of Gorgan (Esin, 1979, p. 46). According to Rawlinson, the city of Dahistan may possibly be situated by the coast of the Caspian Sea (Rawlinson, 1879, p. 166). Later, the researches led to the assumption that Dahistan must be located at the intersection point of the rivers Atrak and Sumbar, while “*Buhaira*” must be situated at Hasan-kuli gulf (see Esin, 1979, p. 46-47).

When the Islamic armies under the command of Yazid ibn Muhallab conquered these lands, Sūl Tigin visited the Prophet Mohammad's tomb in Madina and adopted the religion of Islam in the presence of the holiest person in Islamic belief (As-Sahmī, 1950, p. 194); and after this date, when his "*mawla*" (master and protector) and friend Yazid rebelled against the Omayyads, he fought by his side against oppression and the new Omayyad armies commanded by Maslama ibn Abd al-Malik. After Yazid was caught and killed, Sūl Tigin shared his destiny in 720 and was brutally slayed together with his soldiers. Following Sūl Tigin's death, many Turkish aristocrats from the same dynasty, who were titled "*Sūlī*", served in Jurjān as well as in other Islamic lands as men of science, commanders, or sometimes as governors (See Esin, 1979, p. 49-51).

3.1. The Sūl Gate (*Bāb al-Sūl*)

Early period Islamic sources like Tabarī mention that Sasanian rulers made defense fortifications and barriers built in the north of Gorgan region even since the times of Yazdagerd II and Peroz. Tabarī explicitly alludes to the name Jūrjān (Gorgan) while mentioning such stone walls and cities built in the Sūl region by the order of Khosraw Anosherwan. According to Tabarī, these activities were carried out against the Turkish emperor Sinjibu Khakan, namely Istemi Kaghan who was in the vicinity of the Sūl land (Tabari, 1879, p. 159-160). Similarly, Ibn al-Athīr from the 13th century wrote about a stone fortification in the Sūl region and Jurjān. As for the information provided by Tabarī, it is

likely that such construction activities were carried out in various regions of the Sasanian country (see Gadjiev, 1980, p. 144-152).

Such barriers, which were built around Gorgan and sometimes signified by the word *hāit* (*Sūr*) in Arabic, were named “*Bābu Sūl*” (*Sūl* Gate / Pass). According to Yegishe from the Armenian sources, Yazdagerd II made a fortress-city built here by the name “*Shahristān-i Yazdagerd*” against the attacks of the tribe (*Sūl*) referred to as “*Hun*” after defeating the Chor / *Sūl* monarch and subjugating some of the rulers here; and the sources also from the Sasanian period mention the same fortress. Scholars share different views regarding whether the city of “*Shahristān-i Yazdagerd*” was built in the east or west of the Caspian Sea in the Middle East; some scholars put forth serious oppositions and introduce proofs that this city was built in the east of the Caspian Sea. Gadjiev, at the end of his archaeological research and literature survey, associates “*Shahristān-i Yazdagerd*” with Torpah-kala which is among the biggest structures of the Sasanian period in Caucasia. According to Gadjiev’s determinations since 1980’s, Torpah-kala is a city ruin located 20 km south of Darband and close to Baliği village. This mudbrick fortress is one of the most important defense areas together with the Darband fortification (See Gadjiev, 1980, p. 144-152; Gadjiev, 2000, p. 67; Gadjiev, 2001, p. 32-40).

According to Tabarī, the following Sasanian ruler Peroz made a fortress-city called “*Rūshān-Fīrūz*” built between Gorgan and “*Bābu Sūl*” against the *Sūl* raids (Esin, 1979, p. 43; Harmatta, 1998, p. 81). After the Empire of the Hephthalites was demolished by the Turks, the dominance in the north-east frontiers passed into the hands of a more powerful state; and by their encouragement and motivation, the *Sūl*

Turks attacked to the boundaries and the Gorgan people; thus the next ruler Khosraw Anosherwan launched a cruise against the Sūl Turks, killed great numbers of people and replaced about 80 survivors in the city of *Shahram Fîrūz*.

Some serious objections were made against the information given in the sources regarding whether this *Bābu Sūl* is situated in the east or west of the Caspian Sea; because it is cited both in Armenian and Sasanian as well as Islamic sources, yet mentioned in terms of the Turkish attacks on Sasanian lands from both sides of the Caspian Sea, which led the Sasanian rulers to take defense precautions and build fortresses in both sides.

The researches carried out in the region by Rawlinson at the end of the 19th century, and by Y. Kiani since 1970's have demonstrated that such barriers and fortress fortifications as well as the settlements in Gorgan had been built since the time of the Parthians, and these constructions continued until the Sasanian period. Kiani detected about 15 fortresses and city ruins in the region even in 1970's (Esin, 1979, p. 43).

4. Gorgan Region and the Sasanian System of the Walls for Defense

Gorgan is the region which is named as “*Hyrkania*” in Latin and referred to as *Varkāna* in Persian sources, and means the territory of “wolves”; the name was transferred to the Islamic sources as “*Jurjān*”. This region is in the north of Iran and Albruz Mountains and expanded

from the south-east of the Caspian Sea to the further east; and since it was used by nomadic tribes in the north-east of Iran to penetrate into the inner lands of Iran, several fortifications were made here since the time of the Parthians. One of its most significant archaeological remains is the briquette-built wall of Alexander the Great which is quoted also as “*Sadd-i Iskandar(ī)* (the barrier of Alexander)”. This structure is in length of at least 195 km and expanded from the coastline of the Caspian Sea to Pish Kamar hills in the east. While M. Y. Kiani made a dating for it in favour of a 2nd or 1st century B.C., nowadays it is estimated that the both walls (“*Red Snake*” and Tammisha wall) were built in the 5th or possibly 6th century A.D. (Rekavandi et al, 2008, p. 16). According to the later Islamic sources, Gorgan people erected a defense wall at a time to protect themselves from the raids of the Sūl Turks. In fact, one of the Abbasid chaliphs sent there a group of men to investigate whether such a wall existed or not, and these men eventually discovered the wall. In line with the conception in Islamic and even in Christian and Jewish literature, it was commonly believed that this wall was in fact the Wall of Alexander the Great, or even the Great Wall of China.

5. “*Sadd-i Iskandar(ī)*” (Alexander’s Wall)

It is also interesting that a wall belonging to Alexander the Great is mentioned in Islamic and Western sources as well as in the Caucasus and Turkestan (Gorgan). Alexander the Great is generally acknowledged in Medieval Islamic Eastern literature and associated with *Zulkarneyn* (Him of the Horns, The Horned-One) mentioned in Qur’an or with the

name of (*I*)*skandar* (Alexander); it is believed that he adopted the religion of Islam. The National poet of Iran, Ferdowsī's *Shahnāma* is the first among the literary works that introduced Alexander as both a historical and legendary character to the Islamic Eastern literature. In the section of "*Alexander's reign*", Ferdowsī mentions the wall he made built against the Ya'jūj and Ma'jūj people (Firdausi, 1912, p. 163-165).

According to several narratives of *Alexander-Romance* or *Alexander Legend*, including the Syriac version, written down for "religious and political purposes" in 628-629, the narratives in the Old and New Testaments, and the Islamic tradition echoed in the Qur'an under the influence of the Biblical narratives; Zulkarneyn banished the Gog and Magog / Ya'jūj and Ma'jūj people to the East, and made an iron wall built to prevent them from returning to the West. Some Arabian writers conveyed the personal accounts of people such as Sallām et-Terjemān who claimed to have seen the wall of Ya'jūj and Ma'jūj, and the geographer Ibn Hordādbēh (d. 912) among these writers read the letter given to him by Sallām to the Abbasid khalif.³ The khalif was probably Vāsik (842-847). Sallām was apparently a Khazar Jew, and was involved in the committee assigned by the Khalif in about 843 to investigate the rumors that the Wall had been perforated (Needham, 1971, p. 56 and n. h). Ibn Hordādbēh also includes a section about this issue (Ibn Hordādbēh, 1986, p. 129-133). Both the Franks and the Arabs were informed about the Great Wall of China; and researchers such as De Goeje already note that this long wall may well be the Great Wall of China (Needham, 1971, p. 56).

³ About Sallām et-Terjemān, his traveling and this *Sadd-i Iskandarī* see Ibn Hordādbēh, 1986, p. 20-22, 43-46.

The Syriac version of *The Alexander Romance* is different from and more clarifying than the Qur'ān and the Bible concerning the issue of by and against whom the Alexander's Wall was built, and includes the view that it was constructed in Caucasia and against the Huns integrated with the Gog and Magog people (see Bladel, 2007, p. 187). Some researchers note that these incursions may be related to the “*Turkish*” attacks of 626-627.

There is more than one “*long wall*” built in the north-east of the Sasanian land against Turkish attacks in the Sasanian period. The longest and most famous of these walls is the one known as *Sadd-i Iskandar*, *Sadd-i Piruz*, *Sadd-i Anushirevan* (in Persian), and *Kızıl-İlan / Alan* (= Red Snake) (in Turkish), an enormous mud brick wall in the north-east of Iran, situated by the Gorgan river and the eastern coastline of the Caspian Sea. There are approximately 40 forts along the wall; and fortified big defense points were constructed at the back sides of the forts (see Christensen, 1993, p. 140). In his work, the historian Tabarī mentions twice the construction of the Alexander's Wall because of the wars of the Sasanian ruler Peroz in the Gorgan valley firstly against the Kionites and later against the Hephthalites, and his defense activities here. However, Tabari notes that the wall was made of stone. Peroz, the Sasanian king was killed in the war against the Hephthalites in 484, but his activities were continued by his son Kavad I and later Hosraw I advanced the fortifications in Gorgan region further (Christensen, 1993, p. 161). Therefore, it is evident that the structure called as “Alexander's Wall” was built during the reign of Peroz and received its final shape in the period of Hosraw I (Harmatta, 1998, p. 80-81). Mudbrick walls reaching up to 250 km in length were built even around the Marv oasis

in Iran. These long walls were connected in time with the already famous Alexander's Wall and were reflected in the Islamic sources as "*Sadd-i Iskandar(ī)*".

M. Y. Kiani provides an assumption that if such a wall had been built, it must have been done so during the reign of the Parthian emperor Mithradates II (Mehrdād) (123-87 B.C.) and that it was rebuilt later by the Sasanians (Kiani, 2003, www.iranica.com). However, since the attacks in that period were not launched from the north-east but from the east and the walls did not continue as far as to the sea, this wall must have been built in the period of Peroz as justifiably noted also by Harmatta (Harmatta, 1998, p. 81-82). Kiani describes the structure of the approximately 180 km long *Sadd-i Iskandar(ī)* (Kleiss, 2001, www.iranica.com).

6. The Significance of the Caucasian Passes

Since the records of the Roman historian Tacitus, the tribes in the north of the Caucasia were attacking the Trans-Caucasia, attacking the south using the Alan gate in the west while heading for Anatolia and the Darband gate on the coast of the Caspian Sea while heading for Iran. For example, the Western Huns, after the Alans and the Albanians, used these passes while entering Anatolia as from the 4th century: they penetrated into the Anatolian and Syrian lands by pushing their way through the Darial pass during their attacks in 395, 396 and 397, and they retreated to the north probably by using the Darband gate after their defeat by the Sasanians on their way back. During the victorious

Sasanian wars between 415 and 420, it was assumed that the Huns penetrated into the inner lands of Iran by going round the north and south of the Caspian Sea and maybe by using the Sül gates in the east. As a matter of fact, the Huns launched their expeditions in 445-446 in the east of the Caspian Sea; and they attacked the Gorgan region from the east of the Caspian Sea, because the Caucasian passes were occupied by the Sasanians and the possibility of passing through this region was eliminated.

The Caucasian passes in the western coast of the Caspian Sea played significant roles in the inclusion of the Huns in the north of Caucasia in the events taking place in Caucasia in 450-451 with regard to the relations between the Sasanians and the Armenians. Against the religious pressure of the Sasanians on the Armenians, Vardan Mamikonyan asked for military support from Honk (Hun) Kingdom in the north of the Darial and Darband passes. Meanwhile, the Armenian forces in the leadership of Vardan's nephew Vahan entered Albania in order to open the Caucasian passes for the Huns, and completely destroyed the Chor Pass which was in the hands of the Sasanians and referred to as the "*Honk (Hun) Gate*", as well as the other gates and fortifications around. The damage was so great that the destruction of the gates here caused the deepest grief for the Sasanian emperor Yazdagerd II. Later the Armenians made a sworn agreement with the Huns (Thomson, 1982, p. 129-130; Tezcan, 2007, p. 194). In accordance with the information provided by Yegishe, although Yazdagerd later repaired the Chor Gate, it was demolished again by the Huns (Thomson, 1982, p. 180-181).

The Hun emperor Atilla sent mounted troops to the Caucasian front, but the Sasanians blocked the Caucasian passes to prevent the help of the Huns. Consequently, as the Huns failed to come down to the south and provide the Armenians with the necessary military support in time. So, the Armenians sustained a big defeat in the bloody Avarayr battle between 26 May and 2 June 451, and a great number of Armenian aristocrats were either killed or taken captive. The war between the Sasanians and the Turks in the Caucasian front continued during the reign of Istemi Kaghan and the reign of the Byzantium emperor Heraclius in the first half of the 7th century. The Turks, who were trying to get down to the south by using the Darband gates, threatened the Sasanians via the Sabirs and the Khazars in the north of Caucasus.

In this respect, the following information given in the sources about the Darband Pass and the Caucasian relationship in the period of Heraclius is worth mentioning: According to Moses Dashurantsi and the Greek Theophanes, Heraclius collected an army “*to cross the Great Caucasian mountains covering the countries in the north-east*”. The aim of this army was to let many barbarian tribes inside and thus open the Chogai (Darband) Pass to enable to conquer the Sasanian Empire under reign of Hosrow (Movsēs Dasxuranci, 1963, p. 87). Actually, Heraclius succeeded to open the gates, and the dreadful “Hun” attacks fluctuated into the Sasanian lands, and Heraclius launched an expedition to the region in 628-629 in order to provoke the residents of Caucasia for rebellion. The tribes in this region were fully aware of the situation. The Turks, maybe as allies with the Khazars, entirely destroyed the whole Caucasian Albania, Georgia and Armenia until 630; it is understood that

the Turks acted in unison with Heraclius in these incursions (Bladel, 2007, p. 187).

In these wars, Byzantium cooperated with the Sasanians against the Turks at times when the nomads threatened Byzantium lands and interests, and supported the attacks of the Turks in the Gorgan region in the east of the Caspian Sea and Caucasia when it turned against the Sasanians. The same is also true for the Sassanians: the Sasanians monopolized the Caucasian passes and tried to prevent the passing of the ambassadors and even of the trade caravans from there (See Tezcan, 2007, p. 195). In respect to Zamarkhos' activities of delegacy, it is narrated in the Byzantium sources that while a Byzantium-Turkish alliance was tried to be sealed in the middle of the 7th century, neither the Turkish council of delegates nor the Byzantium delegates were permitted free passage in Caucasia. Sometimes, Sasanian rulers asked for military and financial support from Byzantium against the nomadic threats in Caucasia, and used this money to repair the Caucasian passes. Great powers of the Near East such as Rome, Byzantium and Sasanians attached great importance to fortify the Caucasian passes.

In conclusion, against the nomadic attacks from the north and the east, the settled empires like Rome and Byzantium in Anatolia, Parthians and Sasanians in Iran penned down works to learn about them; always took precautions and tried to keep control of these frontiers, building fortresses, long walls and even cities. Such frontier fortifications are called *limes* in the Roman world. As pointed out by Harmatta, despite all the archaeological, historical and literary studies carried out until today, the issue of *Limes Sasanicus* has not been given sufficient attention. There is still no entire consensus among the researchers due to the

reasons that names and events in the sources bear similarities, historical events in both sides of the Caspian Sea took place in the same periods and generally by the same nomadic tribes, and the measures against these threats were sometimes taken by the same emperors.

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AMIT – Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Iran und Turan.

BAI – Bulletin of the Asia Institute.

BSOAS – Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies.

CHEIA – The Cambridge History of Early Inner Asia, Edited by D. Sinor, Cambridge University Press, 1990.

CHI – The Cambridge History of Iran, vol. 3 (1) and 3 (2). The Seleucid, Parthian and Sasanian Periods, Edited by E. Yarshater, Cambridge University Press, 1983.

DAI – Deutsche Archäologisches Institut.

EI – Encyclopaedia of Islam. New Edition.

ITED – Islam Tetkikleri Enstitüsü Dergisi.

PRGSMRG – Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society and Monthly Record of Geography.

TİD – Tarih İncelemeleri Dergisi.

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