


ORIENTALS IN LATE ANTIQUE ITALY: SOME OBSERVATIONS

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Abstract: Some evidence points at the presence of Orientals in late Roman Italy: traders (labeled “Syrians”), petty sellers (the *pantapolae* in *Nov. Val.* 5), but also students, professors such as Ammianus Marcellinus, or pilgrims. Although being Roman citizens, nonetheless they were considered foreign individuals, subject to special restrictions. The actual strangers made a different case, especially the Persians. The situation of foreign individuals was quite different. Chauvinistic attitudes are widely attested, and they worsened in critical periods, for example after Adrianople. This may explain the laws of early 397 and June 399, promulgated during Stilicho’s regency, which prohibited the wearing of trousers (*bracae*) and some fashionable boots called *tzangae*. Of course, some protégés of the imperial court had the right to enter Italy, as it was the case of the Sassanian prince Hormisdas, who accompanied Constantius II in his visit of Rome in 357.

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As Claudia Moatti recently argued, “In our times of globalization and of the construction of Europe as a free space, it is easy to understand that territories are pure constructions, that identity can be plural, that freedom of movement is not a fact of nature.”¹ This is particularly interesting for the late Roman empire, when the application of the Antonine Constitution gave way to new strategies of distinction:² accordingly, using the mere category of ethnicity is inadequate. The application of the methodology of transnational studies to the late antique evidence suggests several sorts of approach concerning different categories of individuals: as Mark Humphries remarks, “...while individual political histories might be traced across significant geographical distances, perhaps the greatest utility of adapting a world/global perspective on late antiquity would be in terms of thematic comparisons.”³

¹ Moatti 2006, 118. See Moatti 2012.

² Barbero 2006, 43–46; Moatti 2014.

³ Humphries 2017, 26.

As a matter of fact, one of the results of Caracalla's edict was the subdivision of the imperial territory into *civitates*.⁴ In a seminal article, Ralph Mathisen argued that “the interrelationships among citizenship, nationality, ethnicity, and identity have evolved as a consequence of factors such as a renewed role for religious identity and mass migrations that have altered the ethnic composition and influenced the cultural norms of the society of nearly every modern nation.”⁵ Accordingly, Ammianus calls *cives Romani* the citizens of the *Urbs*.⁶ In fact, the recent critics of globalization, and the more recent apologists of populist sovereignty, are at pains to criticize the concept of cosmopolitanism. This is actually a modern concept, dating back to the eighteenth century, but some elements may be detected in Imperial and Late antique texts. The first attestation of *κοσμοπολίτης* “citizen of the world” is not earlier than Philo of Alexandria, whose doctrine influenced Augustine's *City of God*, who thought that God promoted order and peace through the Roman empire.⁷

Myles Lavan, Richard Payne, and John Weisweiler have observed that “like other analytical terms derived from Greco-Roman traditions, such as ‘political,’ ‘imperial,’ or ‘urban,’ the usage of ‘cosmopolitan’ should be rooted in our own contemporary political-theoretical discourse, rather than Hellenistic or Roman thought.” They continue: “Whether a conqueror, a monk, or a merchant, the cosmopolitan regards an encounter with a politically, linguistically, ethnically, and/or religiously distinct group as an opportunity to incorporate its members into their network of political, religious, or economic communities [...] cosmopolitan networks often proved stable entities that gradually reshaped the identities of their participants—cosmopolitans and their local interlocutors alike—in terms of the normative framework.”⁸ As Weisweiler recently argued, “the formation of a new ecumenical political culture had only limited effects on the ethnic self-understandings of Roman elites.”⁹

Greek inscriptions from Northern Italy give evidence on several individuals, from major centers such as Milan or Aquileia, but also from smaller sites, as in the case of the epitaph of the Syrian Maraōtēs, originally from the village of Kaprotabis (Kafartab), found in the modern center of Angera, on Lake Maggiore.¹⁰ While awaiting a complete geographical study of these Oriental individuals, we may start from the pioneering article by Denis Feissel on the provenance of Syrian expatriates attested by inscriptions: Italy is represented by several epitaphs of Concordia,¹¹ and by some evidence from the Roman Catacombs. All these individuals come from the region of Apamea.¹² Possibly, for this reason, according to a cliché dating back to the Principate, in Late antique Italy a

⁴ A survey of the literature in Licandro 2021.

⁵ Mathisen 2006, 1011.

⁶ Amm. 27.9.9: *proposito civium Romanorum aptissima et adolescebat gloria praeclari rectoris plura et utilia disponentis*.

⁷ Philo, *Op.* 3; 142. See Traina 2016.

⁸ Lavan – Payne – Weisweiler 2016, 10; for a thorough examination of historiography, see Busetto 2017.

⁹ Weisweiler 2016, 202.

¹⁰ *SEG* 55,1040. The editors seem to consider him a trader (David – Mariotti 2005). On the importance of Northern Italy in the trading routes from the Eastern to the Western Empire, see Traina 2013.

¹¹ Feissel 1980.

¹² Feissel 1982.

trader is often called *Syrus*.¹³ On the other hand, a closer analysis of the texts shows that in Late Antiquity, *Syrus* may often designate the specialized traders. In a famous letter that describes Ravenna as a sort of topsy-turvy city, Sidonius makes a series of oppositions. One of them is *foenerantur clerici, Syri psallunt*, “the clergymen lend money at interest, the Syrians sing the psalms.”¹⁴

“Syrian” expatriates were busy selling luxury goods and slaves. Slaves make another important point: as Kyle Harper highlighted, “The trade was a multitude of complex and layered markets, with intermediate hubs connecting bulk supply to local demand. These markets created innumerable points of contact between society and the slave trade.”¹⁵ It was always difficult to detect the origin of slaves, but eunuchs made a special case in the trade of human individuals. According to a passage of the *Life of Severus Alexander*:

It must be added, furthermore, that he never had eunuchs in his councils or in official positions—these creatures alone cause the downfall of emperors, for they wish them to live in the manner of foreign nations or as the kings of the Persians, and keep them well removed from the people and from their friends, and they are go-betweens, often delivering messages other than the emperor’s reply, hedging him about, and aiming, above all things, to keep knowledge from him. And since they are nothing but purchased chattels and slaves, how, pray, can they have knowledge of the right? And indeed, this was Alexander’s own opinion too; for he used to say, ‘I will not permit slaves purchased with money to sit in judgment on the lives of prefects and consuls and senators.’¹⁶

The author of the *Historia Augusta* seems to criticize the sizeable presence of eunuchs in Roman courts. As Keith Hopkins suggested, this phenomenon developed after Diocletian, as a possible side effect of the capture of the Persian harem by Galerius in 298.¹⁷ However, despite several manifestations of rebuttal of this practice in literary sources, court eunuchs were also employed in the West.¹⁸ As for their origin, they were not necessarily all Orientals, despite the current “projection of effeminacy onto Eastern peoples.”¹⁹ Wars

¹³ [Cracco] Ruggini 1959, 188–189: “...si constaterrebbe una crescente prevalenza degli orientali, e soprattutto degli ebrei, fra i mercanti. Costoro non sarebbero più rappresentati da elementi sparsi e latinizzati come nei secoli precedenti; ma, raggruppati in colonie etnicamente compatte, avrebbero ora il monopolio d’ogni specie di traffic in tutti i principali centri urbani dell’Occidente. Per questo il termine *Syrus*, in Gerolamo come in Salviano e in Sidonio Apollinare, più che designazione etnica precisa sarebbe semplicemente sinonimo di *mercator* e di *generator* al tempo stesso...”.

¹⁴ Sidon., *epist.* 1.8.2–3: *ita tamen, quod te Ravennae felicibus exulantem auribus Padano culice perfosis municipalium ranarum loquax turba circumstilit. in qua palude indesinenter rerum omnium lege perversa muri cadunt aquae stant, turres fluunt naves sedent, aegri deambulant medici iacent, algent balnea domicilia conflagrant, sitiunt vivi natant sepulti, vigilant fures dormiunt potestates, faenerantur clerici Syri psallunt, negotiatores militant milites negotiantur, student pilae senes aleae iuvenes, armis eunuchi litteris foederati. tu vide, qualis sit civitas, ubi tibi Lar familiaris incolitur, quae facilius territorium potuit habere quam terram.* See Traina 2009, 53.

¹⁵ Harper 2011, 99.

¹⁶ *HA Sev. Alex.* 66.3–4: *huc accedit quod eunuchos nec in consiliis nec in ministeriis habuit, qui soli principes perdunt, dum eos more gentium aut regum Persarum volunt vivere, qui eos a populo et amicis summovent, qui internuntii sunt aliud quam respondetur saepe referentes, claudentes principem suum et agentes ante omnia, ne quid sciat. qui cum empti sint et servi fuerint, quid tandem possunt boni sapere? erat denique eius ipsius sententia, “Ego de praefectorum et consulum et senatorum capitibus mancipia aere empti iudicare non patior.*

¹⁷ Hopkins 1978, 192.

¹⁸ Tougher 2015.

¹⁹ Kuefler 2001, 47.

against Persia boosted the development of anti-Oriental clichés, such as the association of Easterners and effeminacy.

As the late Lellia (not yet Cracco) Ruggini showed almost sixty years ago in her analysis of evidence from Northern Italy, Oriental and Jewish individuals were attracted by the presence there of the imperial court: they were essentially soldiers, bureaucrats, lawyers, and luxury traders.²⁰ Another interesting group of individuals were the *pantapolae*. This Greek loan-word was applied to the petty sellers ousted from Rome, possibly by order of the *Praefectus Urbi*.²¹ As we know from a *Novella* of Valentinian III, who called them back, the expulsion of these sellers was a consequence of the *dissensio et maxima invidia tabernariorum magis quam venerabilis urbis Romae utilitas* “the dissent and utmost envy of the shopkeepers rather than the practical needs of the venerable city of Rome.”²² Namely, the local guilds of shopkeepers (*tabernarii* seems to be a rather pejorative term) managed to extort Valentinian III this measure to their advantage, but the difficult situation caused by Vandal disturbances in the Mediterranean determined the return of the *pantapolae*.²³ Moreover, it was necessary to boost the economic revival of the *Urbs* after the catastrophe of 410.²⁴ In fact, the chauvinistic bias against “Greeks,” that is Roman citizens coming from the *pars Orientis*, was a good argument in favor of the interests of the locals. For instance, in 383 CE, when the prefect Symmachus ordered to oust the *peregrini* during a famine (throwing out the “wandering scholars” but retaining 3,000 ballerinas), it seems that these *peregrini* were not only strangers in a strict technical sense, but also Roman citizens who were not domiciled in the *Urbs*: possibly Ammianus Marcellinus, a bitter witness of this event, was a part of the lot and whimpered against the *indignitas* of his own times:

At last we have reached such a state of baseness, that whereas not so very long ago, when there was fear of a scarcity of food, foreigners were driven neck and crop from the city, and those who practised the liberal arts (very few in number) were thrust out without a breathing space, yet the genuine attendants upon actresses of the mimes, and those who for the time pretended to be such, were kept with us, while three thousand dancing girls, without even being questioned, remained here with their choruses, and an equal number of dancing masters.²⁵

This passage shows that foreigners, no matter whether Roman citizens or not, were accepted by a civic community if they were considered “favoured immigrants.” However, this was not always enough. Once again, we must consider the traders.²⁶ In his criticism

²⁰ [Cracco] Ruggini 1959.

²¹ Giardina 1981, 126–133.

²² Nov. Val. 5, *praef.*: *Urbis Romae, quam merito caput nostri veneramus imperii, in tantum nos cura non deserit, ut quieti eius atque abundantiae modis omnibus consulamus. Graecos itaque negotiatores, quos pantapolas dicunt, in quibus manifestum est maximam inesse multitudinem magnamque in emendis vendendisque mercibus diligentiam, ulterius non patimur sacrae urbis habitatione secludi, licet eos dissensio et maxima invidia tabernariorum quam venerabilis urbis Romae utilitas a negotiatione submovert.*

²³ Giardina 1981, 127.

²⁴ Roberto 2015, 111.

²⁵ Amm. 14.6.19: *Postremo ad id indignitatis est ventum, ut cum peregrini ob formidatam haut ita dudum alimentorum inopiam pellerentur ab urbe praecipites, sectoribus disciplinarum liberalium inpendio paucis sine respirazione ulla extrusis, tenerentur minimarum adseclae veri, quique id simularunt ad tempus, et tria milia saltatricum ne interpellata quidem cum choris totidemque remanerent magistris.*

²⁶ On the mobility of traders in Late antiquity, see Moatti 2011.

against Symmachus, Ambrose of Milan generically defends the *peregrini*—farmers and traders,²⁷ but does not consider professors: in the bishop’s eyes, such individuals, who were also pagans, were less than useful for the *Urbs*: on the contrary, the expelled *peregrini* had been formerly useful for the food supply.²⁸

In his study of the *Praefectura Urbis*, André Chastagnol argues that the accepted foreigners in the *Urbs* were busy in “useful” occupations: professors, actors, and coachmen. At the same time, actors and coachmen could be easily recorded, along with pimps and prostitutes, as “infamous individuals” (*famosi*) in the blacklists prepared by the *secretarium tellurense*.²⁹ The idealized emperor Severus Alexander, according to the *Historia Augusta*, “used to attend the public spectacles, but he was very niggardly in giving presents, saying that the actors and wild-beast hunters and chariot-drivers should be treated as if they were our slaves, or huntsmen, or grooms, or ministers to our pleasure.”³⁰ But what about the professors, rejected despite their limited number? We have some evidence on Ammianus’s Roman public lectures of his *Res Gestae*: Libanius’ letter 1063, written in 392, records the activity in Rome by the Antiochene Marcellinus, who is most likely, despite the skepticism of some scholars, the famous historian Ammianus Marcellinus.³¹

I envy you for possessing Rome and her for her possession of you... as I am told by new arrivals from there, you either have taken or will take part in recitations, since your history is divided into numerous sections where each published portion wins approval and invites another. I am told that Rome itself crowns your work and that her verdict is that you are superior to or not inferior to other authors.

According to Cracco Ruggini, these admirers mentioned by Libanius were less the Roman senators than other Oriental expatriates. The success of professors depended on their acquaintances: for instance, the poet Claudian, an Egyptian protégé of Stilicho, received important rewards as the titles of tribune and notary, a prestigious marriage, and even a bronze statue in the forum of Trajan.³² He was active in Rome after 394, and, conveniently enough for him, died before Stilicho’s disgrace.

If professors were not exempt from such expulsions, the situation of students was even worse. Apparently, ordinary Oriental students did not sail for Rome but stayed in Constantinople, Alexandria, or Berytus, like Claudian who came from Alexandria. As Raffaella Cribiore argues: “The rhetorical texture of his poems as well as their structure and themes are a sure indication of the rigorous education in rhetoric he acquired in Alexandria.”³³ At any rate, it was not easy to study in Rome. Like in other historical periods, students were considered as potential social nuisances. According to a law of Valentinian in 370:

²⁷ Ambr. *de off.* 3.7, 45–52, esp. §46: *quam inutile quoque tot populos mundo perire, quos dira conficiebat tabes: quantos urbi suae perire, qui solerent adiumento esse, vel in conferendis subsidiis, vel in celebrandis commerciis.* See Giardina 1981, 128.

²⁸ Giardina 1981, 127.

²⁹ Chastagnol 1960, 267.

³⁰ *HA Sev. Alex.* 37.1.

³¹ See Cracco Ruggini 2005, 136–137.

³² Cameron 1965, 498–499.

³³ Cribiore 2007, 162.

All persons who come to the City because of their desire for learning shall first of all upon arrival present to the *magistri censuales* the requisite written documents from their several provincial judges, by whom the right to come to the City must be given. These documents shall contain the name of the municipality from which each student comes, together with his birth certificate and letters of recommendation certifying to his high attainments. In the second place, immediately upon matriculation the students shall indicate the profession for which they intend to study.³⁴

A report on the progress of their studies was also needed: the *censuales* “shall carefully investigate the life of the students at their lodging places, to see that they actually do bestow their time on the studies which they assert that they are pursuing.” This is not unusual. As a matter of fact, my own research students from African countries must provide a similar dossier in order to renew their permit of residence in Paris. But in Valentinian’s law, a report on their moral behavior in Rome was also needed. The *censuales*

shall warn the students that they shall severally conduct themselves in their assemblies as persons should who consider it their duty to avoid a disgraceful and scandalous reputation and bad associations, all of which We consider as the next worst thing to actual criminality. Nor shall the students attend shows too frequently nor commonly take part in unseasonable carousals.

Moreover, they could not stay more than two years: “if any student in the City should fail to conduct himself as the dignity of a liberal education demands, he shall be publicly flogged, immediately put on board a boat, expelled from the City and returned home”;³⁵ Claudia Moatti argued that “all this shows a society used to controls and police surveillance, as is indicated also by the action taken against the vagrants, the beggars, and all the itinerants at this time and later.”³⁶ In fact, these measures implied the application of a sort of *registracija po mestu postojannogo proživanija propiska* (or, more familiarly, the *propiska*), the residency permit established in Tsarist and Soviet Russia: actually, a tool for recording migration.³⁷

Whereas many Roman citizens did not like foreigners, others showed particular forms of courtesy. Socrates Scholasticus narrates the story of the ruthless *mancipes* at the time of Theodosius’ short stay in Rome in 389. Eventually, the Emperor stopped several abuses. One of them was perpetrated by the *mancipes* who were in charge of “buildings of immense magnitude, erected in ancient Rome in former times, in which bread was made for distribution among the people” and “converted them into receptacles for thieves”:

³⁴ CTh 14.9.1: *Imppp. Valentinianus, Valens et Gratianus AAA. ad Oybrium praefectum urbi. quicumque ad urbem discendi cupiditate veniunt, primitus ad magistrum census provincialium iudicum, a quibus copia est danda veniendi, eiusmodi litteras perferant, ut oppida hominum et natales et merita expressa teneantur; deinde ut in primo statim profiteantur introitu, quibus potissimum studiis operam navare proponant; tertio ut hospitia eorum sollicitè censualium norit officium, quo ei rei impertiant curam, quam se adseruerint expetisse. idem immineant censuales, ut singuli eorum tales se in conventibus praebeant, quales esse debent, qui turpem inhonestamque famam et consociationes, quas proximas putamus esse criminibus, aestiment fugiendas neve spectacula frequentius adeant aut adpetant vulgo intempestiva convivia. quin etiam tribuimus potestatem, ut, si quis de his non ita in urbe se gesserit, quemadmodum liberalium rerum dignitas poscat, publice verberibus adfectus statimque navigio superpositus abiciatur urbe domumque redeat.*

³⁵ Cecconi 2007.

³⁶ Moatti 2006, 122.

³⁷ On this system see, e.g., Moine 1997 and Light 2012.

Now as the bake-houses in these structures were placed underneath, they build taverns at the side of each, where they kept prostitutes; by which means they entrapped many of those who went thither either for the sake of refreshment, or to gratify their lusts, for by a certain mechanical contrivance they precipitated them from the tavern into the bake-house below. This was practiced chiefly upon strangers; and such as were in this way kidnapped were compelled to work in the bake-houses, where many of them were immured until old age, not being allowed to go out, and giving the impression to their friends that they were dead. One of Theodosius's soldiers, victim of the trick, managed to escape. The Augustus punished the *mancipes* and ordered to pull down the ancient structures.³⁸

Thus far we have seen, "Orientals" means East Roman citizens.³⁹ The situation of foreign individuals was quite different. Chauvinistic attitudes are widely attested, and they worsened in critical periods, for example after Adrianople. This may explain the laws of early 397 and June 399, promulgated during Stilicho's regency, which prohibited the wearing of trousers (*bracae*) and some fashionable boots called *tzangae*:

Within the venerable City no person shall be allowed to appropriate to himself the use of boots or trousers. But if any man should attempt to contravene this sanction, We command that in accordance with the sentence of the Illustrious Prefect, the offender shall be stripped of all his resources and delivered into perpetual exile...within the City of Rome no person shall wear either trousers or boots. But if any man after the issuance of this regulation of Our Clemency should obstinately persist in such contumacy, he shall be punished according as his legal status permits and expelled from our sacred City.⁴⁰

Usually, the term *tzanga* (*tzangion* in Greek; the variants *zanga* or *zanca* are also attested) is associated to Persia: however, in Byzantine Greek, *τζαγιόν* designates the

³⁸ Socr. HE 5.18.3–7: Ἦσαν ἐξ ἀρχαίου κατὰ τὴν μεγίστην Ῥώμην οἴκοι παμμεγέθεις, ἐν οἷς ὁ τῆ πόλει χορηγούμενος ἄρτος ἐρίνετο, οἱ τε προϊστάμενοι τούτων, οἱ μάγκιτες τῆ Ῥωμαίων γλώσση καλοῦνται, προϊόντος τοῦ χρόνου ληστήρια τοὺς οἴκους πεποιήντο. Ὡς γὰρ ἦσαν οἱ τῶν οἰκῶν μυλῶνες κατὰ βάθους τὴν θέσιν ἔχοντες, κατὰ τὸ πλευρὸν ἐκάστου οἰκήματος καπηλεῖα κατασκευάσαντες, πόρνας τε ἐν αὐτοῖς προστησάμενοι, δι' αὐτῶν ἐλοχῶντο πολλοὺς, τοὺς μὲν τῆ χρεῖα τῆς τροφῆς εἰσιόντας, τοὺς δὲ καὶ δι' ἄκρασιαν αἰσχροῦς ἠδονῆς· ἐκ γὰρ τινος μηχανῆς ἐκτοῦ καπηλείου εἰς τὸν μυλῶνα ἐνέπιπτον. Καὶ τοῦτο ἔπασχον μάλιστα οἱ ξένοι τῆ Ῥώμῃ ἐπιδημοῦντες· ἠναγκάζοντό τε οἱ ἄλόντες ἐν τοῖς μυλῶσιν ἐργάζεσθαι, πολλοὶ τε κατηγήρασαν ἐν αὐτοῖς μὴ συγχορηθέντες ὑπεξελεθεῖν, τοῖς τε οἰκείοις ἑαυτῶν τοῦ τεθνηκέναι δόξαν παρεσηκότες. Ἐν τῆ παγίδι αὐτῆ τῶν στρατιωτῶν τις τοῦ βασιλέως Θεοδοσίου ἐνέπεσεν. Ἐπεὶ δὲ ὁ στρατιώτης κατὰκλειστος τῷ μυλῶνι γενόμενος ἐξελεθεῖν οὐκ ἠφίετο, σπασάμενος ἦν εἶχε παραξιφίδα τοὺς κωλύοντας διεχρήσατο· οἱ δὲ φόβῳ κρατηθέντες τὸν στρατιώτην ἀπέλυσαν. Γνοὺς ταῦτα ὁ βασιλεὺς τοὺς μάγκιτας μὲν ἐτιμωρήσατο, τοὺς δὲ ληστοδόχους οἴκους ἐκείνους καταστραφῆναι ἐκέλευσεν. See Enslin 1953, 503.

³⁹ The status of Oriental pilgrims is still a desideratum, complicated by the chronological problems. But it is worth noting at least one example from the Catacombe di S. Ippolito (*ICUR* VII, n° 19943; Carletti 1995, 224): among the Greek graffiti of pilgrims, the individual Ἀρτάκις (iotacism for Ἀρτάκης) bears an Iranian name, mostly attested in Caucasian contexts (Justi 1895, 33). On graffiti in sacred spaces, see the remarkable study by Yasin 2015.

⁴⁰ *CTh* 14.10.2: *Impp. Arcadius et Honorius AA. ad populum. usum tzangarum adque bracarum intra Urbem venerabilem nemini liceat usurpare. si quis autem contra hanc sanctionem venire temptaverit, sententia viri illustris praefecti spoliatum eum omnibus facultatibus tradi in perpetuum exilium praecipimus. et cetera. dat. proposita Romae in foro divi Traiani Caesario et Attico cons. CTh* 14.10.3: *Idem AA. Flaviano praefecto Urbi. intra urbem romam nemo vel bracis vel tzangis utatur. quod si quisquam post praeceptum nostrae clementiae in hac contumacia perduraverit, prout condicio siverit, cohercitus sacra Urbe pelletur. et cetera. dat. viii id. Iun. Brixiae. Theodoro v. c. cons.* See Kazhdan 1991.

Emperor's red boot.⁴¹ According to Matthew Canepa, "The adoption of the *tzaggia* probably occurred sometime during or after reign of Heraclius, who had wide-ranging access to Sasanian booty and court officials; however, there is not enough evidence to argue the dating conclusively."⁴² A Persian etymology of *τζαγγίον* is not clear, and the modern assumption of a Persian etymology of *τζαγγίον* cannot be taken for granted.⁴³ At any rate, the laws of 397 and 399 does not seem to consider these boots as imperial garments. Moreover, the Theodosian Code associates them with a law of Honorius and Theodosius II, dating to 416, which prohibited long hair and fur cloaks.⁴⁴ Nonetheless, the association of breeches and Oriental boots was ideologically important. Breeches were traditionally considered as a barbarian garment, in opposition to the traditional Roman or Greek clothing, and were worn as well by Persians and by Northern peoples. But the precious *tzangae* were not merely an element of the *habitus Barbarus*. In the mid-fourth century, the Syrian author Ephraim mentions a man "who is barefoot today and tomorrow requires *tzangae* or *caliga*, who is today garbed in coarse wool and tomorrow wants fine silk." A similar cliché may be found in Eugippius' *Vita Severini*, in a passage also quoted by the *Anonymus Valesianus*, concerning Odovacar: before starting his ambitious adventure, he consulted the saint who told him to go to Italy where he could get rich, being not anymore a miserable Barbarian dressed with animal hides.⁴⁵ Possibly, the iconography of the *tzangae* may be detected in the reverse of a golden medallion struck in Treviri (between 313 and 315?), with the inscription "to the glory of both *Augusti*," but with the portrait of Constantine alone. This shows the usual iconography of a walled fortress, or a city, with two defeated barbarians sitting outside, representing two enemy warriors: a Northern barbarian and an Oriental with his typical cap and boots. As I argued in an earlier paper, the fortress represents the Empire as a whole, a stronghold ruling the Mediterranean Sea, well protected by the couple of *Augusti*, defending the West from the Germans and the East from the Persians.⁴⁶ And it is worth noting the absence of Oriental auxiliary or federate troops in Italy, according to the lists found in the *Notitia dignitatum*: on the other hand, Sarmatian units of *gentiles* were a part of the permanent army in Italy: a law of Valentinian I and Valens, dating from the early 370s, stated that "none of the provincials, of any rank or status, may there be a marriage with a barbarian wife, nor may any provincial woman marry any of the *gentiles*."⁴⁷

In special cases, Persian individuals could be accepted in Italy. The elderly Sassanian prince Hormisdas, who accompanied Constantius II during his only visit to Rome in 357, as described by Ammianus, was a *persona grata*.⁴⁸ Victim of court intrigues, he was imprisoned in Persia around 309, but in 324 he managed to flee to the Roman empire where he loyally served as a counsellor and a general: in 363, when he was in his seventies, he

⁴¹ Malal. 413–17–18; *Chron. Pasch.* 614. See also Theoph. 168.14–169.27. See Kazhdan 1991.

⁴² Canepa 2009, 204.

⁴³ Schwentner (1955) points at some similar Iranian lemmas bearing the meaning "ankle," such as Middle Persian *zang*: MacKenzie 1971, 98; see also Mayrhofer 1992, 564, on Indo-Iranian *jānghā* "the lower part of the leg." But there is no evidence of a Persian lemma meaning "boot."

⁴⁴ von Rummel 2007, 156–157.

⁴⁵ Traina 2020. See also the commentary on Amm. 2 in Den Boeft *et al.* 2018, 16, 20–21.

⁴⁶ Traina 2015, 53.

⁴⁷ *CTh* 3.14.1.

⁴⁸ Sources and bibliography in Shahbazi 2004.

was one of Julian's commanders in the Eastern campaign.⁴⁹ Hormisdas' story was particularly juicy, and Constantius' visit, on the occasion of the thirty-fifth year of his reign, was particularly important in providing the historian with an opportunity to celebrate the grandeur that was Rome:

To this prince Hormisdas, who was standing near him, and whose departure from Persia I have described above, replied with native wit: 'First, Sire,' said he, 'command a like stable to be built, if you can; let the steed which you propose to create range as widely as this which we see.' When Hormisdas was asked directly what he thought of Rome, he said that he took comfort in this fact alone, that he had learned that even there men were mortal.⁵⁰

As a nobleman who experienced the Persian empire, Hormisdas was no ordinary courtier, nor an ordinary *foederatus* officer. Ammianus highlights his Persian origins and his wit, typical of his *gens*, but the most interesting detail is provided by the indirect tradition provided by the Italian humanist Biondo Flavio, who was reading a more complete manuscript of Ammianus and gives some valuable supplementary details of Hormisdas' presence in Rome.⁵¹ As Ammianus/Biondo implied, he was *peritissimus architecturae*.⁵² A good reason to allow him—we do not know whether he was allowed to wear *tzan-gae*—to visit the Eternal City.

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⁴⁹ In a similar way young Tiridates, the future king of Armenia, in the second half of the third century: Traina 2002, 458–460.

⁵⁰ Amm. 16.10.16: *Cui prope adstans regalis Ormizda, cuius e Perside discessum supra monstravimus, respondit astu gentili "ante" inquit 'imperator stabulum tale condi iubeto, si vales: equus, quem fabricare disponis, ita late succedat, ut iste quem videmus'. Is ipse interrogatus quid de Roma sentiret, id tantum sibi placuisse aiebat, quod didicisset ibi quoque homines mori*. See Edbrooke 1975 and Humphries 2019, 245–246.

⁵¹ Cappelletto 1983. On the problems of Biondo's evidence see Sabbah 1985 and, more skeptically, Cameron 1989. Although the relationship between Ammianus and Biondo is (see Sabbah 1985; Cameron 1989), a sheer falsification is unlikely. After all, Ammianus "liked to spread himself when he had a good story to tell, and he liked stories about deserters" (Cameron 1989, 428).

⁵² Biondo 1510, 59: *Continebant vero, stante Romana re, ad eum pontem hincinde maxima aedificia, quae ab Ocriculo ad ipsam urbem Romam ita continuabantur ut non vicus unus neque plures villae viderentur esse, sed ipsam urbem usque ad Ocriculum protendi appareret. Siquidem Ammianus Marcellinus, Constantii Caesaris primo nati adventum a Constantinopoli Romam libro sextodecimo describens, dicit ipsum duxisse in comitatu Ormisdam, Persarum gentis architecturae peritissimum, iussisseque illi ut primaria quaeque dignioraque urbis Romae aedificia diligenter inspecta ordine sibi ostenderet. Et cum Ocriculum de itinere esset ventum, imperatore iubente omnium colloquio destitutum, ab Ocriculo Romam prius ingressum fuisse quam quo in loco urbs incohasset discernere ac intelligere noverit*. See Traina 2006, 266.

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