

= Peter the Patrician =

Peter the Patrician (Latin : Petrus Patricius , Greek : ?????? ? ?????????? , Petros ho Patrikios ; c . 500 ? 565) was a senior East Roman or Byzantine official , diplomat , and historian . A well @-@ educated and successful lawyer , he was repeatedly sent as envoy to Ostrogothic Italy in the prelude to the Gothic War of 535 ? 554 . Despite his diplomatic skill , he was not able to avert war , and was imprisoned by the Goths in Ravenna for a few years . Upon his release , he was appointed to the post of magister officiorum , head of the imperial secretariat , which he held for an unparalleled 26 years . In this capacity , he was one of the leading ministers of Emperor Justinian I (r . 527 ? 565) , playing an important role in the Byzantine emperor 's religious policies and the relations with Sassanid Persia ; most notably he led the negotiations for the peace agreement of 562 that ended the 20 @-@ year @-@ long Lazic War . His historical writings survive only in fragments , but provide unique source material on early Byzantine ceremonies and diplomatic issues between Byzantium and the Sassanids .

= = Biography = =

= = = Early career : envoy to Italy = = =

Peter was born in Thessalonica about the year 500 , and was of Illyrian origin according to Procopius ; according to Theophylact Simocatta , however , his origin was from Solachon , near Dara in Mesopotamia . After studying law , he embarked on a successful career as a lawyer in Constantinople , which brought him to the attention of Empress Theodora . In 534 , on account of his rhetorical skills , he was employed as an imperial envoy to the Ostrogothic court at Ravenna . At the time , a power struggle was developing there between Queen Amalasuntha , regent to the young king Athalaric , and her cousin Theodahad . Following the death of Athalaric , Theodahad usurped the throne , imprisoned Amalasuntha , and sent messages to Emperor Justinian hoping for recognition . Peter met the envoys at Aulon , on his way to Italy , and notified Constantinople , seeking new instructions . Emperor Justinian ordered him to convey the message to Theodahad that Amalasuntha was under the Emperor 's protection and not to be harmed . Nevertheless , at the time Peter arrived in Italy , Amalasuntha had been killed ; Procopius 's narrative in the Gothic War is ambiguous here , but in his Secret History , he explicitly claims that Peter arranged the murder of Amalasuntha on instructions from Theodora , who feared her as a potential rival for Justinian 's attentions . Whatever assurances might have been privately given by Theodora to Theodahad , in public , Peter strongly condemned the act , and declared that there would be " war without truce between the emperor and themselves " as a result .

Peter then returned to Constantinople with letters from Theodahad and the Roman Senate to the imperial couple , bearing pleas for a peaceful solution , but by the time he reached the imperial capital , Emperor Justinian had resolved on war and was preparing his forces . Consequently , Peter returned to Italy in the summer of 535 conveying an ultimatum : only if Theodahad abdicated and returned Italy to imperial rule , could war be averted . A two @-@ pronged Byzantine offensive followed soon thereafter , attacking the outlying possessions of the Ostrogothic kingdom : Belisarius took Sicily , while Mundus invaded Dalmatia . Upon hearing these news , Theodahad despaired , and Peter was able to secure wide @-@ ranging concessions from him : Sicily was to be ceded to the Byzantine Empire ; the Gothic king 's authority within Italy was severely restricted ; a gold crown was to be sent as an annual tribute and up to 3 @,@ 000 men were to be provided for the imperial army , underlining Theodahad 's subject status . Theodahad , however , fearing that his first offer would be rejected , then instructed Peter , under oath , to offer the cession of all Italy , but only if the original concessions were rejected by Justinian . In the event , Justinian rejected the first proposal , and was delighted to learn of the second one . Peter was sent back to Italy with Athanasius , bearing letters to Theodahad and the Gothic nobles , and for a time it seemed as if the cradle of the Roman Empire would return peacefully to the fold . It was not to be : upon their arrival in Ravenna ,

the Byzantine envoys found Theodahad in a changed disposition . Supported by the Gothic nobility and buoyed up by a success against Mundus in Dalmatia , he resolved to resist , and imprisoned the ambassadors .

= = = Magister officiorum = = =

Peter remained imprisoned in Ravenna for three years , until released in June / July 539 by the new Gothic king , Witigis , in exchange for Gothic envoys sent to Persia who had been captured by the Byzantines . As a reward for his services , Emperor Justinian then appointed Peter to the post of magister officiorum (" Master of the Offices ") , one of the highest positions in the state , heading the palace secretariat , the imperial guards (the Scholae Palatinae) , and the Public Post with the dreaded agentes in rebus . He would hold this post for 26 consecutive years , longer by a wide margin than any other before or after . At about the same time or shortly thereafter , he was raised to the supreme title of patrician and the supreme senatorial rank of gloriosissimus (" most glorious one ") . He was also awarded an honorary consulship . As magister , he took part in the discussions with Western bishops in 548 on the Three @-@ Chapter Controversy , and was repeatedly sent as an envoy in 551 ? 553 to Pope Vigilius , who opposed the emperor on the issue . Peter is also recorded as attending the Second Council of Constantinople in May 553 .

In 550 , he was sent as envoy by Justinian to negotiate a peace treaty with Persia , a role he reprised in 561 , when he met the Persian envoy Izedh Gushnap at Dara , to end the Lazic War . Reaching an agreement over the Persian evacuation of Lazica and the delineation of the border in Armenia , the two envoys concluded a fifty @-@ year peace between the two empires and their respective allies . The annual Roman subsidies to Persia would resume , but the amount was lowered from 500 to 420 pounds of gold . Further clauses regulated cross @-@ border trade , which was to be limited to the two cities of Dara and Nisibis , the return of fugitives , and the protection of the respective religious minorities (Christians in the Persian Empire and Zoroastrians in Byzantium) . In exchange for Persian recognition for the existence of Dara , whose construction had originally sparked a brief war , the Byzantines agreed to limit their troops there and remove the seat of the magister militum per Orientem from the city . As disagreements remained on two border areas , Suania and Ambros , in spring 562 , Peter travelled to Persia to negotiate directly with the Persian Shah , Chosroes I , without however achieving a result . He then returned to Constantinople , where he died sometime after March 565 .

His son Theodore , nicknamed Kontocheres or Zetonoumios , would succeed him as magister officiorum in 566 , after a brief interval where the post was held by the quaestor sacri palatii (" Quaestor of the Sacred Palace ") Anastasius . He held the post until some time before 576 , being appointed as comes sacrarum largitionum (" Count of the Sacred Largess ") thereafter ; in the same year , he also led an unsuccessful embassy to Persia to end the ongoing war over the Caucasus .

= = Assessment = =

As one of the leading officials of the age , Peter was a controversial figure , receiving greatly differing assessments from his contemporaries . To John Lydus , a mid @-@ level bureaucrat of the praetorian prefecture of the East , Peter was a paragon of every virtue , an intelligent , firm but fair administrator and a kind man . Procopius also attests to his mild manners and desire to avoid giving insult , however at the same time he accuses him of " robbing the scholares " (the members of the Scholae) and being " the biggest thief in the world and absolutely filled with shameful avarice " , as well as being responsible for the murder of Amalasuntha .

From quite early in his career , Peter was renowned for his learning , his passion for reading , and his discussions with scholars . As a speaker , he was eloquent and persuasive ; Procopius calls him " fitted by nature to persuade men " , while Cassiodorus , who witnessed his embassies to the Ostrogoth court , also praises him as vir eloquentissimus and disertissimus (" most eloquent man ") , and as sapientissimus (" most wise ") . On the other hand , the late 6th @-@ century historian

Menander Protector , who relied on Peter 's work for his own history , accuses him of boastfulness and of rewriting the records to enhance his own role and performance in the negotiations with the Persians .

= = Writings = =

Peter wrote three books , all of which survive only in fragments : a history of the first four centuries of the Roman Empire , from the death of Julius Caesar in 44 BC to the death of Emperor Constantius II (r . 337 ? 361) in 361 AD , of which about twenty fragments are extant ; a history of the office of *magister officiorum* from its institution under Emperor Constantine the Great (r . 306 ? 337) to the time of Emperor Justinian , containing a list of its holders and descriptions of various imperial ceremonies , several of which are reproduced in chapters 84 ? 95 of the first volume of the 10th @-@ century *De Ceremoniis* of Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos (r . 913 ? 959) ; and an account of his diplomatic mission to the Persian Empire in 561 ? 562 , which has been used as a source by Menander Protector . Until recently , Peter was also ascribed the authorship of the 6th @-@ century *Peri Politikes Epistemes* (" On Political Science ") , a six @-@ volume book discussing political theory , drawing extensively from Classical texts such as Plato 's *The Republic* and Cicero 's *De re publica* . It too survives only in fragments .

Peter was the first late Roman / Byzantine author to write on imperial ceremonies , beginning a tradition that lasted unto the 14th century . His histories are also an important historical source ; for instance , his work alone preserves the negotiations and provisions of the Roman ? Persian treaty of 298 between Galerius and Narseh .

The *Lost History of Peter the Patrician* , published by Routledge in 2015 , is an annotated translation from the Greek by Thomas M. Banchich of the fragments of Peter ? s *History* , including additional fragments which used to be considered the work of the Roman historian Cassius Dio 's so @-@ called Anonymous Continuer .