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Perceptions of Iran

HISTORY, MYTHS AND NATIONALISM
FROM MEDIEVAL PERSIA TO
THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC

I.B. TAURIS
LONDON · NEW YORK

Published by I.B.Tauris & Co. Ltd in association with the Iran Heritage Foundation

Historiography in late antique Iran

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In his lectures at the University of California, Berkeley in 1961, the great ancient historian Arnaldo Momigliano made some important observations on Persian mood and method of historical thinking and historiography. According to him, at least with the Achaemenid Persians, there seems to have been specific views on present history as evidenced by Darius the Great's autobiographical narrative of the Behistun Inscription.¹ But the Achaemenid Persians also possessed a profane history of their immediate past, largely indebted to the Jewish and Mesopotamian tradition. The Persian Royal Chronicle(s) were in existence and the king of kings did go to them to learn about the past and make judgments based on them for his own time. This we can gather from the biblical sources in regard to Achaemenid historiography in the sixth and fifth centuries BC.²

A millennium later, in the sixth century AD when the Sasanian Persian king, Khusro Anushīrvan, set about putting together a history of the past, things had changed drastically. Alexander the Great had brought the destruction of the Achaemenid Persian Empire and with it the loss of memory of what happened before Alexander.³ Furthermore, the new Persian historical narrative, the *Khodāy-nāmag* (Book of Lords, or Book of Kings), not only dealt with the immediate past, but also constructed a history from the beginning of the world, from the cosmic creation, to the assault of the Evil Spirit which set the universe in motion, to the measured and pre-set battle between Ohrmazd and Ahriman. The *Khodāy-nāmag* also narrated the existence of a group of mythological kings from the Zoroastrian religious tradition – that is, from the *Avesta* – and a few intermediary kings and epic heroes of the Arsacid age.⁴

Indeed, a new history of Iranians was constructed which was to remain the basis of the Persian view of things until the nineteenth century – that is, for almost another millennia. The Persian sacred history of its land, *Ērānshahr* (Domain of the Iranians), only then collided with the profane historical inquiry of the European world, whose beginning was more like the Achaemenid Persian historical tradition, based on scientific and philological inquiry into the nebulous past of humankind.⁵

This chapter will underline aspects of Sasanian and late antique historiography of Iran, explaining the method and mindset in the creation of a sacred narrative which became the foundations of classical Iranian historiography that continued until the nineteenth century. In the outset it should be noted that there exists a great problem for undertaking such a study. This is because much if not all of our sources for Sasanian historiography are either from outside the Sasanian Empire, or from the post-Sasanian period. The Armenian and Georgian sources do mention the existence of a Persian book of Kings, at least from the late Sasanian period. The history attributed to Sebēos mentions a book about the 'tale of the Iranians/Persian'.⁶ Also, according to Leonti Mroveli, in the *History of the Kings of Kartli*, which is dated in the eighth century AD, we have the Armenian and Georgian version of the text, which mentions the story of Fraydun and Biwrasp, as is called in the books of the Persians or the 'Books of the History of the Persians'.⁷

This is in all probability a reference to the *Khodāy-nāmag*, which was put together during the reign of Khusro Anushirvan. Although the Pahlavi version was lost, it may have been the basis for the translation into Arabic in the eighth century AD of the *Siyar al-Muluk* (Chronicle of Kings) by Ibn Moqaffa' and served as the main source for Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*.⁸ Thus far, we are encountering evidence about the existence of a Book of Lords or Book of Kings during the Sasanian period; however, they are not in Pahlavi, but referenced by Armenian and Georgian sources. We also possess the Arabic and Persian versions of the text as well, which are well known and studied.

Temporal events in the Sasanian period and its effect on Sasanian historiography

By the fourth century AD, during the rule of Šābuhr II (AD 309–79), Zoroastrianism was able to gain substantial power, because of the architect of Zoroastrian tradition in the Sasanian period, Adurbad ī Mahrspandān.⁹ There are sufficient Pahlavi texts relating to his activities, as well as his didactic teachings, to see the influence of this all-important priest. It is at this time the title of *Mowbedān Mowbed* (Chief Priest) was first mentioned and attributed to Adurbad ī Mahrspandān.¹⁰ The reason for his importance may be due to the religious conflicts between Iran and Rome in the fourth century AD. In reaction to Christianity's proselytising, Šābuhr II, with the help of Adurbad ī Mahrspandān, attempted to solidify their defence against this seeming spiritual offensive.¹¹ We can see this counter by the Sasanians in the guise of persecution of Christians and the various metrologies from this period.¹²

On the other hand, a strong Zoroastrian defence was needed to fend off the adversary religion. In a sense the idea of a 'Zoroastrian Orthodoxy' is attributed to the fourth century AD, where one set of Zoroastrian dictums was accepted by

the Sasanians. Also at this time religious officials start to become influential in administration, law and government. Thus, when it came to the composition of the 'royal history' or the *Khodāy-nāmag* some two centuries after Adurbad ī Mahrspandān, namely in the sixth century AD, the Zoroastrian priests had already taken a great hand in its composition and the activities of the empire.¹³ The account of the past certainly had to be acceptable to the Zoroastrian view of history by the sixth century AD. By this time Zoroastrianism provided the basic moral and intellectual foundation for the idea of a written royal history, so the records of dynasties and events were shaped by Zoroastrian ideals regardless of historical fact.

Based on a chapter of the Zoroastrian Middle Persian text, the *Budabišn* (Book of Primal Creation),¹⁴ an encapsulated history in Middle Persian, we can make the following suppositions:

- 1) Sasanian history described the beginning of the world according to the Avestan notion of the beginning and the mythical dynasties as enumerated in Yašts 5 and 14.¹⁵
- 2) Sacred history then crash-lands into the historical era with Darius III. This is followed by a brief account of rulers that were important for Zoroastrian historiography including Alexander, and the Arsacid king, Walāxš.
- 3) The Sasanians are then treated in much more detail than any other dynasty, except the Kayānians. The reason for this is that the Sasanians are the heir to the Kayānian dynasty of the Avestan Yašts,¹⁶ who first bore the *xvarənah* ('Divine Fortune' or 'Divine Glory'), the symbol of authority in the Iranian world.¹⁷

The brevity of the interlude, and the omission of the Achaemenids and later the Arsacids, may be that the Sasanian 'sacred history' is not concerned with detailed historical events, but events and personages who are relevant to the Zoroastrian religious tradition. Thus Darius III's defeat at the hands of Alexander and the gathering of the *Avesta* under Walāxš are the important events in the scheme of Zoroastrian sacred history; thus these men among the many were remembered and kept for posterity.¹⁸ Secondly, the Sasanians appear to have wanted to make the point that they were connected to the Kayānians as a mode of establishing their legitimacy in the eyes of the population. It may be for this reason that in Sasanian sacred history, the two dynasties figure so prominently and are so connected to one another. By the beginning of the fifth century AD, some of the Sasanian princes and kings begin to take on Kayānī names, such as Kawād, Khosro and Kāwūs, or titles, such as Rāmšahr (that of Kay Wištāsp). In fact, one can contend that the Sasanian kings began to play the role of the Kayanid kings in history and epic, meaning the imposition of sacred Avestan tradition on to the epic and sacred history of Ērānšahr.¹⁹

While Zoroastrian sacred history has a beginning, it also has to end. This end is brought about by an apocalyptic age which will usher in all sorts of trouble. What the apocalyptic texts predict of course is simply an internalisation and the framing of historical events, written by the author(s), followed by an end-of-time scenario. Then the saviour appears from a cave or a well and evil withers away; the world becomes flat as it was in the beginning and the eternal paradise is established.²⁰

The nature of Sasanian sacred historiography

In late antique Iran the nature of historiography and historical thinking was in many ways different from that of the Greek or Roman or Islamic historiography.²¹ This is because the king and the court wished to hold a monopoly on the record of the past, to legitimise their rule. This hold is rarely encountered in the other mentioned traditions. It is not that these did not have imperial histories, but their histories were written by individuals not under the direct rule of the king or caliph. Armenian historiography is a notable example, where noble families such as the Mamikonean and others commissioned historians to write histories of Armenia and themselves in late antiquity.

Sasanian historiography used the Zoroastrian sacred texts/hymns, the *Avesta*, especially the *Yašts*, as much as the Armenians used the Bible and the Muslims the Quran as a starting point and model in which history revealed itself. In Armenian historiography, events unfolded according to the Christian world view. The development of the written record for Armenia was the work of religious authority and clearly the early works were concerned with religious matters. These ecclesiastical histories were not unique to Armenia, but were the general trend in late antiquity, which is similar in this respect to Iranian historiography.

In Iran, the Zoroastrians wrote their history in a Zoroastrian context, just as the Armenians and Muslims wrote theirs in Christian and Muslim context, respectively; the underlying commonality being their religious view of past, present and future events. Moses Khorenats'i's history shows the accommodation of Armenia's ancient history and pagan past with what Robert Thomson calls a 'Christian orientation'.²² The purpose of the Armenian historians was to present what had happened according to what the church could accept, assimilate Armenian history with Christian ideas and eliminate parts that were unsuitable to Armenian tastes in late antiquity.²³ The same can be argued for Iranian historiography.²⁴ What seemed pagan and contrary to the taste of the *mowbeds* (chief priest) in late antique Iran was omitted, and what was in accord with Zoroastrianism was kept in the *Khodāy-nāmag*. Thus, Sasanian history was given a 'Zoroastrian orientation' and started as described in the *Avesta*. In this scheme, Avestan dynasties such as the Kayanians and the Pishdadadians replaced the Achaemenids and the Arsacids in

the *Khodāy-nāmag*; thus the traditional dynasties in the *Avesta* became the traditional kings of Iran.²⁵

In the Middle Persian epic, the *Kārnāmag ī Ardaxšīr ī Pābagān* (The Vitae of Ardašīr, the Son of Pābag),²⁶ Ardašīr, the founder of the Sasanian dynasty (AD 224–40), not only is connected with the Kayānian kings of the Avestan *Yašts*, but also is said to be from the family (*tōhmag*) of King Dārā (Darius). In the *Kārnāmag*, it seems that Ardašīr was attempting to unify Iran as it had been under the Achaemenids. This may at first glance confirm the Roman historian Herodian's view that Ardašīr knew of his ancestor and claimed those territories by an assertion of ancestral rights. On the other hand it may signal an altered sacred history of Iran, where Freydūn, who ruled over the world and who had divided his realm among his three sons (Iraj, Tuj and Salm) over Iran, Tūrān and Rome, was the point of reference. In Sasanian millennial and apocalyptic historiography, the rule of Ardašīr and his descendants signalled the attempt at the unification of this primal division many eons ago. This would be a sacred view of history as opposed to a profane memory of the past which the Greeks and the Romans held.

It is evident from the external sources we possess that the Sasanian kings mentioned their ancestors and used their memory as a tool for propaganda. By the late Sasanian period, however, the Sasanians were kings of Ērānšahr and did not identify with the Achaemenid kings who were the rulers of a forgotten empire. The Sasanians became the descendants of Freydūn and the Kayanians, who strived to bring peace to the world as it had been in the beginning of time. In many ways the *Šāhnāmeh* of Ferdowsī is the history of late antique Iran, stripped of much of its Zoroastrian outlook. While this narrative may seem 'untrue' today, it was the history that was constructed and disseminated in Ērānšahr. The Sasanians and later many other dynasties on the Iranian plateau used this narrative to justify their existence and identify their adversaries. We may conclude with a passage from the Middle Persian text, *Mēnōg ī Xrad* (Spirit of Wisdom), where the view of who the ancestors of the Sasanian are and how they view the history of the ancient past in late antiquity. In this important passage the reason for the warfare between the Sasanians, Romans and others is given through the sacred narrative of Iranian historiography (Chapter 20):

In the pure Religion it is clearly manifest that the central [reason] for the animosity of the Romans and the Turks toward Iranians is because of the revenge which they implanted with the killing of Iraj, and till the restoration at the end of time it will continue.²⁷

This tradition lived on in Persian historiographical narrative and was also adopted by some of the later Turkic dynasties, taking on both Iranian and Tūrānian lineage. In some ways this Iranian sacred narrative, without its basis being known, has

become part of the Turkic ultra-nationalist agenda as well. But in late antiquity, Rome, Iran and Tūrān were based on the *Avesta*, which had become historicised and politicised. Even in Iran, Afghanistan and Tajikistan, many still hold to this late antique historiography which has the Persian epics as its source.

Specimen of late antique historiography

In order to understand the development of historiography in late antique Iran, one must view the existing passages and chapters on history in the Middle Persian texts. What the *Bundahišn* (Book of Primal Creation) and other Middle Persian texts describe as history is nothing else than the exposition of a sacred Zoroastrian history composed in the Sasanian period. Its first part resembles that of the Avestan Zamyād Yašt tradition, followed by the Sasanian view of the intermediate period between themselves and the Kayānids. Historians have given little value to these texts, because unlike the Arabic and later Persian histories, the sequence of events in the Middle Persian texts are thought to be disordered, unclear, vague and in many instances needing elucidation. The 33rd chapter (according to Anklesaria, 18th according to Bahār) of the *Bundahišn* is surprisingly clear and presents the final and the encapsulated version of Sasanian sacred historiography. This enumeration of sacred history is paralleled with that of the *Šābnāme of Ferdowsī*, which in turn could show us the content of the lost Sasanian *Khodāy-nāmag* (Book of Lords/Book of Kings). By reviewing the content of this chapter, one is struck by the similarity between it and that of the *Šābnāme*, which can only mean that they are drawn from a parallel or the same source.

The greater or Iranian *Bundahišn* is contained in three manuscripts: those of TD1,²⁸ TD2²⁹ and DH.³⁰ TD1 and DH appear to be the oldest manuscripts and belong to the sixteenth century, while TD2 was last copied in the early seventeenth century. The chapter is contained in the parts of the following manuscripts: DH 90.16–97.2; TD1 181.2–189.11; TD2 211.3–220.15. I have provided my translation based on the three manuscripts, which I hope is of use for those interested in Persian historiography:

On the disasters which came to Ērānšahr in each millennium

- 1) When the Evil Spirit rushed forth, in the beginning of the millennium of the mixed state, there was the bull and Gayōmard. When Mašyā and Mašyāne became ungrateful, for 50 years from them there was no birth. In that same millennium for 70 years Hōšang and Tahmuras both killed the demons. At the end of the millennium, the demons cut Jamšēd.
- 2) In the beginning of the second millennium, Až-ī Dahāg held evil-rule for a thousand years, when the millennium ended Frēdōn captured and bound [him].

- 3) In the beginning of the third millennium, when Frēdōn distributed the lands, Salm and Tuj, then they killed Iraj, and his children and offspring were scattered.
- 4) In the same millennium, Manūčīhr was born and sought the revenge of Iraj.
- 5) Then Frasiyāk came, Manūčīhr along with Iranians were driven out to Padišwargar, and destroyed them by trouble and misery and much death, and Fraš and Nodar, the sons of Manūčīhr were killed, till other [of their] offsprings took Ērānšahr from Frasiyāk.
- 6) When Manūčīhr was dead, again Frasiyāk came, he held Ērānšahr till much destruction, and non-Ērānians came to it, [and] he withheld rain from Ērānšahr, till Uzāw the son of Tahmāsb came and repelled Frasiyāk and brought rain which they call 'the New Rain'.
- 7) And after Uzāw, again Frasiyāk brought serious harm to Ērānšahr, till Kawād came to rulership.
- 8) During the rulership of Kāwūs, in the same millennium the demons became strong, [and] death came to Ōšnār and his [Kāwūs'] thought was led astray, so he went to battle the sky and fell downwards, his glory departed from him, then by horse and men they [demons] destroyed the material world, through deception [they] bound him [Kāwūs] along with the notables of Kayānids at the summit of Hamāwarān.
- 9) One who is called Zēngāw, who has poison in his eyes, came to rulership of Ērānšahr from the Tāzīgs [Arabs]. Whoever he saw through his evil-eye he killed. The Iranians by desire sought Frasiyāk to return. He killed Zēngāw and became the ruler of Ērānšahr and took many people from Ērānšahr to settle in Turkestān and ruined and destroyed Ērānšahr, till Rustam prepared from Sīstān and took Samwarān [Hamāwarān], and freed Kay Kāwūs and other Iranians from captivity. He fought with Frasiyāk by the Xorīg Rudbār which is called Spehān [Isfahān]. He made a winning battle, from there [he] inflicted defeat and a second time did much battle with [Frasiyāk], till he defeated and threw him to Turkestān and made Ērānšahr prosper anew.
- 10) Again Frasiyāk endeavoured and Kay Siyāwaxš came to battle him, to take Sūdābeh. Because of Sūdābeh who was the wife of Kāwūs, Siyāwaxš was with Sūdābeh, Siyāwaxš again did not return to Ērānšahr. For this reason, Frasiyāk in this manner accepted [gave] protection, he [Siyāwaxš] did not go to Kāwūs, by himself he went to Turkestān [and] took the daughter of Frasiyāk as wife. Kay Khusro was born from him, Siyāwaxš was killed there.
- 11) In the same millennium, Kay Khusro killed Frasiyāk, he himself went to Kangdiz and gave the rulership to Luhrāsp, when Wištāsp had ruled for 30 years the millennium ended. See Shayegan, M. R. (2001).
- 12) Then the fourth millennium began, in that millennium Zoroaster received [and] brought the religion, Wištāsp accepted [the religion] and made it current. [He] battled hard with Arzāsp, many Iranians and non-Iranians then perished.
- 13) In the same millennium, when rulership came to Wahman, the son of Spandiyādān, and there was ruin, Iranians perished [killed] one another and there was no one from the seed of the rulers left who would rule. Then they brought Humāy, the daughter of Wahman, to rulership.

- 14) Then during the rulership of Dārāy, the son of Dārāy, Alexander the Caesar of Rome rushed to Ērān, [he] killed King Dārā and destroyed all the family of the rulers [and] Magus who were visible in Ērānšahr, and extinguished countless fires, and took the religion of the Mazdā worshipping religion and the commentary [of the *Avesta*] and sent it to Rome and burnt the *Avesta* and divided Ērānšahr into 90 king[dom]s.
- 15) Then during that millennium, Ardašīr, the son of Pāpag became visible and killed those divided rulers, established the kingship and made the religion of the Mazdā worshipping religion current and restored much of the customs which went through his family.
- 16) During the rulership of Šābuhr, the son of Hormizd the Arabs came, they took Khorīg Rūdbār, for many years with contempt [they] rushed till Šābuhr came to rulership, he destroyed the Arabs and took the land, and destroyed many Arab rulers and pulled out many number of shoulders.
- 17) During the rulership of Pērōz, the son of Yazdgerd, for six years there was no rain; serious harm and severity came to people.
- 18) Again Khwašnawāz of the Hephethlite kings came and killed Pērōz and Kawād [and his] sister [and] Ardašīr were taken as hostage to the Hephethlites.
- 19) During the rulership of Kawād, Mazdak, son of Bāmdād, became visible and established the law of Mazdak and deceived [and] deluded Kawād, and ordered to hold women and offspring and property in association and co-possession, and made the religion of the Mazdā worshipping religion ineffective, till the Immortal Soul, Khosro, the son of Kawād, became powerful, [he] killed Mazdak and put to order the religion of the Mazdā worshipping religion, and defeated those Hayūns who by horses raided Ērānšahr and closed their path and made Ērānšahr without fear. See Shayegan, M. R. (2001) and Wiesehofer, J. (2010).
- 20) And when the rulership came to Yazdgerd [III], he ruled for 20 years, then the Arabs rushed with many numbers to Ērānšahr, Yazdgerd [III] was not able to battle them, [he] went to Xwarāsān and Turkeštān, and asked for horses and men for assistance, he was killed there.
- 21) The son of Yazdgerd [III] went to India and brought army [and] troop, and before arriving, he was killed in Khurāsān and that army and troop were destroyed. Iran was left to the Arabs and they have made that law of evil religion current, much customs of the ancients they [have] destroyed and the religion of the Mazdā worshipping religion was made feeble and they established the washing of the dead, burying the dead and eating the dead.
- 22) And from the primal creation of the material world till today, a heavier harm has not come; because of their evil behaviour, misery and ruin and doing violence and evil law, evil religion, danger and misery and other harm have become accepted.
- 23) In the religion it is said that their evil rule will come to an end.
- 24) A group will come, with red signs [and] red banners, and will capture from Persia [and] the districts of Iran to Babylon. They will weaken the Arabs.
- 25) And then someone will come from the direction of Khurāsān, an evil man, he will destroy the people of Padišxwārgar and will misrule for several years, under his leadership in Persia people will be destroyed, with the exception of few on the coast of Kāzerūn, till he would not remain.

- 26) From then on Hayūns [and] Turks in many numbers and many banners will rush to Ērān, they will ruin this prosperous sweet-smelling Ērānšahr and destroy the family of the nobility. They will do much harm and violence to the people of Ērānšahr, many houses will be uprooted and destroyed and seized, till the gods have mercy.
- 27) And when the Romans arrive and organise to rule for a year, at that time from the district of Kāwūlistān someone will come whose glory is from the family of the lords, they call him Kay Wahrām. All the people again will be with him and will also rule all the districts of India, Rome and Turkeštān. He will prevent all the sinful arrangements, will arrange the religion of Zoroaster, no one will be able to bring to public any other belief.
- 28) And in the same province, Pašotan, the son of Wištāsp, will come from Kangdiz with 150 righteous men, he will raze that idol-temple(s) which is their secret place and will establish the fire of Wahrām in its place and will always speak [and] arrange the right religion.
- 29) And then when the fifth millennium of Ušēdar begins, Ušēdar, the son of Zoroaster, will appear according to the religion and the true messenger will come from Ohrmazd, like Zoroaster had brought, he will also bring the religion and propagate it. Distress and drought will lessen, generosity and peace and un-revengefulness will increase in all the material world, for three years he will make the plants green and the Wātaeni river will rush to the height of a horse and the springs and the sea of Kayānsē will again rush and for ten days and nights the sun will remain at the summit of the sky and the species of the wolf, all will be destroyed.
- 30) Then when the millennium of Ušēdar comes to an end, Malkūs the trouble natured, from the seed of Tūr Bratrēš who was the [cause of the] death of Zoroaster, will become manifest. By religious sorcery and witchful desire, he will make a terrible rain which they call Malkūsān, for three years in winter that is cold, and in the summer that is hot, there will be much snow and hail which destroys the creatures, so that all the people with the exception of few [with] fire will be destroyed and then again the arrangement of the people and cattle will be from the 'Jamshid-created enclosure' and for this purpose it is covered.
- 31) This too, that in that time knowledge of healing in 1,000 sorts of plants were created in opposition to 1,000 sorts of illness, will come to two sorts of plants, one sort will come to earth, no one will die by illness, with the exception of old age or murder.
- 32) Then, the sixth millennium of Ušēdarmāh will begin, which is called the millennium of Ušēdarmāh, the son of Zoroaster, by being the prophet he will come from Ohrmazd, like Zoroaster brought the religion, he will too bring the religion [and] make it current in the material world. For 20 days and nights the sun will stand at the summit of the sky, six years he provides greenness to the plants, will destroy that Āz and the seed of Drūz, where the snake with noxious creatures will be destroyed.
- 33) Then near the end of his millennium of Ušēdar[māh?], Dahāg will be released from bond, that Bēwarāsb through evil desire will destroy many creatures and

- creation. In that time, Sōšyans, the son of Zoroaster will become manifest, for 30 days and nights the sun will remain at the summit of the sky.
- 34) First from the world of the dead, Garšāsb, the son of Sām will rise up, will strike Bēwarāsp with mace and kill him [and] keep him from the creatures. The millennium of Sōšyans will begin like the millennium of that Tan Kirdār which was 57 years.
- 35) They say, these three sons of Zoroaster, Ušedar and Ušedarhmāh and Sōšyans, before Zoroaster mated, they brought the glory of Zoroaster to the sea of Kayānsē for preservation [and] entrusted it to *Ābān Xwarrah* [Glory of Waters] which is the Goddess Ānāhīd.
- 36) Now also they say that three lights at the base of the sea glow(s), at night it is always seen, one by one when their own time comes.
- 37) In this manner it will be that a maiden will go the water of Kayānsē to wash her head, that *Xwarrah* [glory] will mix in her body, she will become pregnant, they one by one in the same manner, in their own time thus will be born.

Notes

1. A. Momigliano, *The Classical Foundations of Modern Historiography* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), 7–9. On Persian method of preservation of the memory and history, see A. S. Shahbazi, *Early Persians' Interest in History*, *Bulletin of the Asia Institute*, 4 (1990), 257–65.
2. *Ibid.*, 6.
3. T. Daryaei, 'Imitatio Alexandri and its impact on late Arsacid, early Sasanian and middle Persian literature', *Electrum*, 12 (2007), 89–97.
4. On the composition of the *Khoday-nāmag*, see E. Yarshater, 'Iranian national history', in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, 3(1), 359–477; A. S. Shahbazi, 'On the *Xwaday-nāmag*', *Papers in Honor of Professor Ehsan Yarshater*, *Acta Iranica*, 30, Leiden (1990), 208–29.
5. For the history of Persians and their interest in ancient Iran, see I. Afshar, '*Haft-khān nasidan fe Iran-e bāstān*', in *Bukhara*, 11(70) (2009), 299–310.
6. *The Armenian History Attributed to Sebeos*, tr., with notes, by R. W. Thomson, historical commentary by J. Howard-Johnston, assistance from T. Greenwood, Part 1. *Translation and Notes* (Liverpool, 1999), 13.
7. R. W. Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History. The Medieval Armenian Adaptation of the Georgian Chronicles* (Oxford, 1996), 16.
8. T. Nöldeke, *Geschichte der Perser und Araber zur Zeit der Sasaniden* (Leiden, 1979), xxi. Most recently, see Z. Rubin, 'Ibn al-Muqaffa and the account of Sasanian history in the Arabic Codex Sprenger 30', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, 30 (2005), 59.
9. A. Tafazzoli, 'Adurbād Mahrspandān', *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, ed. E. Yarshater, www.iranica.com/articles/adurbad-i-mahrspandan.
10. *Ibid.*, T. Daryaei, 'Keyanid history or national history? The nature of Sāsānian Zoroastrian historiography', *The Journal of the Society for Iranian Studies*, 28(3–4) (1995), 135.
11. T. Daryaei, *Sasanian Persia: The Rise and Fall of An Empire* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2009), 84–6.
12. S. P. Brock and S. A. Harvey, *Holy Women of the Syrian Orient* (University of California Press, 1987).
13. S. Shaked, 'Administrative functions of priests in the Sasanian period', *Proceedings of the First European Conference Iranian Studies* (Magnes Press, 1990), 261–73.
14. For the English translation, see B. T. Anklesaria, *Zand ī Akāsīh, Iranian or Greater Bundahīšn* (Bombay, 1956). For the Persian translation, see M. Bahār, *Bundahīš* (Tehran: Tūs Publication, 1369); and more importantly his *Bajūbešī dar Asātir-e Iran* (Tehran: Agah Publishers, 1375). For the transcription, see F. Pakzad, *Bundahīšn: Zoroastrišche Kosmogonie und Kosmologie* (Tehran: Band 1, 2005).
15. P. O. Skjærvo, 'Hymnic composition in the *Avesta*', *Die Sprache*, 136 (1994), 217–20.
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Reverse Orientalism: Iranian reactions to the West

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In this chapter, I wish to look at a few instances of how Iran has viewed the West, especially during more recent times. In the same way that Western views of Iran have not always been uniform and have been influenced by the circumstances at different times, Iranian views of the West have also gone through a great deal of change, from unquestioning admiration to complete condemnation.

Orientalism

In his famous and highly influential book *Orientalism*, the late Edward Said describes Orientalism as 'a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient'.¹ He speaks of Orientalism as having developed a life of its own and having its own internal consistency, when a 'formidable scholarly corpus, innumerable Oriental "experts" and "hands" and "Oriental professorates" created a complex array of "Oriental ideas" (Oriental despotism, Oriental splendor, cruelty, sensuality), many Eastern sects, philosophies, and wisdoms domesticated for local European use.'² According to Said: 'It is hegemony, or rather the result of cultural hegemony at work, that gives Orientalism the durability and the strength I have been speaking about so far.'³

Although one may not agree completely with Said's bold generalisations about Orientalism – and it is interesting to note that he was mainly dealing with Western responses to Islamic and Arabic studies, with minor, passing references to great scholars of Persian Studies, such as E. G. Browne, R. A. Nicholson and A. J. Arberry – nevertheless, one cannot argue with the main thrust of his thesis that Orientalism is concerned with how the West sees the Orient, rather than how the Orient exists in reality or how the Orientals see themselves. Edward Said's vision, influenced by Antonio Gramsci's idea of culture as a form of subtle domination by the ruling classes⁴ and Michel Foucault's notion of culture as discourse