

*Ferdowsi, the
Mongols and the
History of Iran*

ART, LITERATURE AND CULTURE FROM
EARLY ISLAM TO QAJAR PERSIA

Studies in Honour of Charles Melville

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On the epithets of two Sasanian kings in the Mujmal al-tawarikh wa-l-qisas

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The *Mujmal al-tawarikh wa-l-qisas* is an interesting and, in some ways, a unique text in Persian dated to 520/1126.¹ The discussion in relation to the text and its importance has been given masterfully by 'Allama Qazvini in the preface to the sole typeset edition, published by Malik al-Shu'ara Bahar in the first half of the twentieth century.² This version was based on a single manuscript from the Bibliothèque nationale in Paris, dated to AD1410. In 2001 an older manuscript, from the fourteenth century, held in the State Library in Berlin, was published in facsimile by M. Omidsalar and I. Afshar.³ This new facsimile, being earlier, helps us to understand better some of the difficulties posed by the text.

The author of the *Mujmal al-tawarikh wa-l-qisas* is unknown,⁴ but he seems to have been a historian of good quality, consulting all the previous works available to him and passing judgement on those that seemed fantastic or untrustworthy. In his preface our anonymous author lists all the books that he consulted and there are a few that are lost to us. These texts appear to provide the *Mujmal* with unique information that cannot be gained from other medieval Arabic and Persian sources.

As a small token of appreciation for my colleague Charles Melville, I would like to discuss two of the epithets of the Sasanian kings mentioned in *Mujmal al-tawarikh wa-l-qisas*, to reconstruct their Pahlavi forms and decipher their meanings. This task has been made possible by the availability of the printed edition of Bahar and the new facsimile edition by Omidsalar and Afshar. The list of Sasanian kings in the *Mujmal al-tawarikh wa-l-qisas* provides a number of epithets, principal associations and personal names for kings and queens. Some of them include:

شاپور پسر هرمز: ذوالاکتاف	Shapur Hurmuz: Dhū'l-Aktāf
اردشیر پسر هرمز بن نرسی: نکو کار / نرم	Ardashir pisar-i Hurmuz b. Narsi: nikūkār/narm
یزدجرد پسر بهرام: بزه گر / ذفر	Yazdijird pisar-i Bahram: ZFR
یزدجرد پسر بهرام گور: نرم	Yazdijird pisar-i Bahram Gur: narm
قباد پسر فیروز: بریزاین ریش	Qubad pisar-i Firuz: BRYZ 'YN RYŠ

Other Sasanian kings have the name of the principality where they ruled before becoming 'king of kings', or their birthplace is mentioned:

بهرام الثالث پسر بهرام بن بهرام هرمز: سکان شاه	Bahram al-Thalith pisar-i Bahram b. Bahram Hurmuz: Sakan Shah
بهرام بن شاپور: کرمان شاه	Bahram b. Shapur: Kirman Shah
کسری نوشروان: فدشخوارگرشاه	Kisra Nushirvan: Fa?dushkwārgar Shah

Finally, there are two interesting personal names for the late Sasanian queens, which are mentioned alongside their throne names:

بوران دخت: هجیر	Burandukht: Hajir
آزرمیدخت: خورشید	Azarmidukht: Khurshid

While most of these epithets for these Sasanian rulers are known, two stand out as they appear to be Pahlavi titles written in Arabic script. The first is easier to interpret and concerns Yazdgird I (399–420), who has two epithets. In his first epithet, ذفر here is certainly Middle Persian *dabr*, which is the epithet that is also given to him in the Pahlavi texts (*Shahrestānīhā ī Ērānshahr* 26):⁵

*shahrestān ī hamadān *yazdgird ī shābuhrān kard kē-shān *yazdgird ī dabr xwānēnd.*

The city of Hamadān was built by Yazdgird, the son of Shābuhr whom they call Yazdgird the rough.

J. Markwart translated Yazdgird's epithet as 'the sinner',⁶ which is associated with him as الائم in Tabari.⁷ But Nöldeke had already interpreted the term correctly as *dabz*,⁸ 'rough, harsh'. Tabari, in discussing Bahram V's reign calls his father الخشن⁹ (*Arabic*). Persian زبر, 'rough', is found in many Perso-Arabic texts,¹⁰ as the epithet of Yazdgird I, including here in the *Mujmal al-tawarikh wa-l-qisas*. ذفر gives us Middle Persian *dabr* (*dpl*), which MacKenzie translated as 'sinner',¹¹ but should mean 'rough', as in Persian زبر is from OIr **dabra*-.¹² However, it is interesting to note that while زبر certainly conveys 'rough', the compound زبر و زرنگ, or also attested زبرزرنگ, means 'clever'. The reason that this is important is because Tabari reports that one of the great sins of Yazdgird I was:

his keenness of intellect, his good education, and the wide-ranging varieties of knowledge he had thoroughly mastered in their proper place, and also his extensive delving into harmful things and his use of all the power he possessed for deceiving people, using his sharpness, wiles, and trickery – all this together with his keen mind, which had a propensity toward evil-doing, and his intense enjoyment in employing these faculties of his.¹³

Thus we are faced with at least two, possibly three, different epithets for Yazdgird I that have been confused. While Yazdgird was called a 'sinner' for decimating the nobility and the Zoroastrian

priests (according to Socrates Scholasticus 8.7.9), and allowing Christianity to thrive by establishing the Persian Christian Church, he received the epithet of the 'sinner' الائم, or Persian زبر in Sasanian-based sources.¹⁴ But then there is the Middle Persian *dabr* (*dbl*), Persian زیر, which means 'rough', and which itself provides the meaning that the ruler was rough; certainly Yazdgird I was rough with the upper class who opposed him. But more interesting is that he was also a sharp and intelligent man, who, according to Tabari and other Sasanian-based sources, used his cleverness (زبر و زرنگی) in evil ways to rule over the Sasanian Empire.

The second epithet derives from Pahlavi into Persian and belongs to Kawad I (r. 488–96/499–531). His epithet in Bahar's edition of the *Mujmal al-tawarikh wa-l-qisas* reads as زیراین ریش, which is unintelligible. However, the new facsimile edition by Omidsalar and Afshar shows the first part of the epithet as بریز or بریز and the last word in the compound as دیش. Bahar, using Hamza al-Isfahani, translated it as Kawad 'who before had an evil religion'. I would like to suggest that the epithet should be read as Middle Persian *pahrēz ī ēwēn-dush*, or *dush-ēwēn-pahrēz*, meaning the 'protector of evil custom'. The 'evil custom' that is referred to is doubtless the Mazdakite doctrine, which seems to have won support from Kawad I.¹⁵ In the *Bundahishn* (33.18), Kawad's action is described as follows:

andar xwadāyih kawād mazdag ī bāmdādān ō paydāgih mad ud dād ī mazdagih nihād ud kawād frēft ud wiyābān kard zan ud frazand ud xwāstag pad hamih ud hambāyih abāyēd dāshtan framūd.

During the rulership of Kawad, Mazdak, son of Bamdad became visible and established the law of Mazdak and deceived (and) deluded Kawad, and ordered to hold women and offspring and property in association and co-possession.

Here it is clearly stated that Kawad supported the 'doctrine' or 'law' established by Mazdak, son of Bamdad. Of course the semantic range of *ēwēn* brings it close to *dād*; in the Psalter 'dwyny is used to translate Syriac *nāmōsā*, that is, the Mosaic Law.¹⁶ *Ēwēn* has also entered Armenian as a loanword (*awrenk*) as 'law', but also 'customary way of life',¹⁷ matching the Middle Persian and Persian meaning. This very much suits our reading of the epithet given to Kawad of adopting the 'evil' law or custom of Mazdak and becoming infamous for it. On the basis of the new manuscript, *dish* can easily be read as Middle Persian *dush*, 'evil', which also appears as a compound with *dēn* as *dush-dēn*, 'evil religion'. In addition, the new manuscript provides بریز for the first word of the compound, which makes it possible to see a Middle Persian *pahrēz*, as opposed to what Bahar had in his manuscript.

There is much more that can be said on the importance of Persian sources such as the *Mujmal al-tawarikh wa-l-qisas* for elucidating details on the history and tradition of the Persianate world. This study of two epithets is an example of what can be excavated from such medieval texts, and these sources are certainly worth devoting time to, as some of them used older books that are now lost to us and can therefore help make clear the history of the past.

شاپورپسر هرمز: ذوالاكتاف	Shapur Hurmuz: Dhū'l-Aktāf
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Notes

- 1 For a discussion of this text, see J.S. Meisami, *Persian Historiography to the End of the Twelfth Century* (Edinburgh, 1999), pp. 188–209.
- 2 *Mujmal al-tawarikh wa-l-qisas*, ed. M.T. Bahar (Tehran, 1334).
- 3 *Mujmal al-tawarikh wa-l-qisas*, eds O. Omidisalar and I. Afshar. *Persian Manuscripts in Facsimile no 1* (Tehran, 2001).
- 4 The author mentions that the ancestor of the author was named Muhallab b. Muhammad b. Shadi.
- 5 T. Daryaei, *Šahrestānīhā ī Ērānšahr: A Middle Persian Text on Late Antique Geography, Epic and History* (Costa Mesa, CA, 2002).
- 6 J. Markwart, *A Catalogue of the Provincial Capitals of Ērānshahr*, Pahlavi Text, Version and Commentary, ed. G. Messina (Rome, 1931), p. 14, n. 26.
- 7 *History of al-Ṭabari: The Sāsānids, the Byzantines, the Lakmids, and Yemen*, trans. C.E. Bosworth (Albany, NY, 1999), p. 70.
- 8 Th. Nöldeke, *Geschichte der Perier und Araber zur Zeit der Sasaniden* (Leiden, 1879), p. 72.
- 9 *History of al-Ṭabari*, trans. Bosworth, p. 82.
- 10 A. Tafazzoli, 'Notes Pehlevies', *Journal Asiatique*, Fasc. 3 & 4 (1972), pp. 270–3.
- 11 D.N. MacKenzie, *A Concise Pahlavi Dictionary* (Oxford, 1986), p. 23.
- 12 H.S. Nyberg, *A Manual of Pahlavi. Part II: Glossary* (Wiesbaden, 1974), p. 61.
- 13 *History of al-Ṭabari*, trans. Bosworth, p. 70.
- 14 T. Daryaei, 'History, epic, and numismatics: on the title of Yazdgerd I (Rāmšahr)', *The American Journal of Numismatics* 14 (2002), p. 91.
- 15 For the latest study on Kawad, Mazdak and the pro-Roman and Pro-Easter/Hephtalite faction, see J. Wiesehöfer, 'Kawad, Khusro I and the Mazdakites: a new proposal', in Ph. Gignoux et al. (eds), *Trésors d'Orient. Melanges offerts à Rika Gyselen*, Cahiers de Studia Iranica 42 (Paris, 2009), pp. 391–409.
- 16 Nyberg, *Manual, Part II*, p. 12.
- 17 Elisha, *History of Vardan and the Armenian War*, trans. R. Thomson (Cambridge, MA, 1982), p. 12.