

ALASDAIR DRYSDALE	Keith McLachlan (ed.), <i>The Boundaries of Modern Iran</i>	248
NADER ENTESSAR	Anthony H. Cordesman, <i>Iran and Iraq: The Threat from the Northern Gulf</i>	250
MONIKA GRONKE	YAN Maria Szuppe, <i>Entre Timourides Uzbeks et Safavides: questions d'histoire politique et sociale de Hérat dans la première moitié du XVIe siècle</i>	253
FRED HALLIDAY	Ervand Abrahamian, <i>Khomeinism: Essays on the Islamic Republic</i>	255
ROBERT E. LOONEY	Jahangir Amuzegar, <i>Iran's Economy under the Islamic Republic</i>	258
AFSHIN MATIN-ASGARI	Mostafa Vaziri, <i>Iran as Imagined Nation: The Construction of National Identity</i>	260
MOOJAN MOMEN & STEPHEN LAMBDEN	Denis MacEoin, <i>Some Sources for Early Bābī Doctrine and History: A Survey</i>	263
JÜRGEN PAUL	Monika Gronke, <i>Derwische im Vorhof der Macht: sozial und Wirtschaftsgeschichte Nordwestirans in 13. und 14. Jahrhundert</i>	266
NESTA RAMAZANI	Najmieh Batmanglij, <i>Persian Cooking for a Healthy Kitchen</i>	268
YANN RICHARD	Daryush Shayegan (transl. John Howe), <i>Cultural Schizophrenia: Islamic Societies Confronting the West</i>	271
BAHRAM TAVAKOLIAN	Leonard M. Helfgott, <i>Ties That Bind: A Social History of the Iranian Carpet</i>	273
HALEH VAZIRI	Homa Omid, <i>Islam and the Post-Revolutionary State in Iran</i>	275
PATTY JO WATSON	Lee Horne, <i>Village Spaces: Settlement and Society in Northeastern Iran</i>	277

Touraj Daryae

National History or Keyanid History?: The Nature of Sasanid Zoroastrian Historiography*

THE OMISSION OF THE ACHAEMENIDS FROM INDIGENOUS ACCOUNTS OF IRANIAN history has puzzled many and led to the assumption that the Sasanids were unaware of the Achaemenids and did not have any historical memory of them; that, if anything, the Sasanids were heirs to the Parthians.¹ The argument put forth is that, with some exceptions, sources from the Islamic period do not really show that the Sasanids knew about the Achaemenids. Indeed, it is correct that the Islamic sources have only a vague recollection of the Achaemenids. But does the vagueness in Islamic historiography in the ninth and the tenth centuries prove that the Sasanids (A.D. 224–651) were unaware of the Achaemenids (550–331 B.C.) during their rule? The question of why the Achaemenids, in spite of their outstanding political and military achievements, were omitted from the national tradition during the reign of the Sasanids—who originated from the same region—has remained unanswered.² It is the aim of this essay to prove that: (1) the Sasanids were aware of the Achaemenids; and (2) the omission of the Achaemenids from the official history was due to the nature of Iranian historiography and historiography in late antiquity in general.

Classical Sources

There are three late classical historians who refer in passing to Sasanid awareness of the Achaemenid empire. Concerning Ardashir I's ambitions Herodian stated that Ardashir had claimed Asia by ancestral right, alleging that since his ancestors from Cyrus to Darius III had ruled these regions, they must now be reunited

*I wish to thank Professors H. P. Schmidt and C. Rapp for their help and comments. This paper is the result of two quarters of study on Sasanid history with Professor M. Morony, and I especially wish to thank him for reading it several times and making enlightening comments. None of the above professors are responsible for its shortcomings. The paper is dedicated to the memory of Mehrdad Bahar.

1. E. Yarshater, "Were The Sasanians Heirs To The Achaemenids?" in *La Persia Nel Medioevo* (Rome, 1971), 517–31. More recently see G. Gnoli, *The Idea Of Iran: An Essay on Origins* (Rome, 1989), 122.

2. E. Yarshater, "Iranian National History" in *The Cambridge History of Iran* 3(1):389.

under his rule.³ Dio Cassius and Ammianus Marcellinus also make similar claims regarding the knowledge of the Sasanids about the Achaemenid Persians.⁴ This in itself does not prove that the Sasanids were aware of the Achaemenids, since many classical authors draw on past historians.⁵ But if these statements are untrue, why should the Romans make such claims in favor of the Sasanids? What could they have gained by putting these words in the mouths of their enemies and giving their territorial ambitions legitimacy?

Sasanid Sources

While the Sasanids seem to be unclear about who their ancestors might have been, their monuments persuade us otherwise. The Sasanid inscriptions on a doorpost at Persepolis have some important information. The inscriptions were carved during one of the halts which Sasanid officials seemed to have made at this place in the fourth century. The last five lines of one inscription read:

He [i.e., the official] caused great rejoicing, and ordered rites performed for the gods. He gave blessings to his father and ancestors. Then he offered blessings to Shapur the king of kings, to his own soul, and also to him who built this structure. May God remember (them?).⁶

It is interesting that the Sasanids considered Persepolis a place worthy of blessing, a place where blessings are invoked upon their ancestors. This would be in line with Ammianus Marcellinus's remark that Shapur knew of his forefathers. Finally, blessings are given to the person who built the place. If the Achaemenids are not the object of veneration here, who then can it be? It is important to note that early Sasanid inscriptions were carved beside the Achaemenid reliefs at Naqsh-e Rostam, further evidence of the imperial aim to connect themselves with the Achaemenids.⁷

3. *Herodian's History* (Cambridge, Mass., 1969), 4:2.2; see also 4:4.4–4.5. The Greek historian covers the period A.D. 180–238. See M. H. Dodgeon and S. N. C. Lieu, *The Roman Eastern Frontier and The Persian Wars, A.D. 226–363* (London & New York, 1994), x.

4. Dio Cassius, *Dio's Roman History* (Cambridge, Mass., 1993), 483; Ammianus Marcellinus, *The Later Roman Empire (A.D. 354–378)*, trans. W. Hamilton (New York, 1986), 27:4–6. Dio was an early-third-century Latin historian. Ammianus, the Latin historian who recorded Shapur II's statements, was an eye-witness to the Persian wars of Constantius II and the expedition of Julian (A.D. 353–378). See Dodgeon & Lieu, *Roman Eastern Frontier*, viii–ix.

5. R. N. Frye, *The History Of Ancient Iran* (Munich, 1983), 287.

6. For a description of the inscription and the text see H. S. Nyberg, *A Manual Of Pahlavi* (Wiesbaden, 1964), xxiii, text 127. For a translation see R. N. Frye, "The Persepolis Middle Persian Inscriptions From the time of Shapur II," *Acta Orientalia* 30 (1966): 83–93.

7. Also, Gnoli has suggested that in ŠKZ (Pth. 16; Gr. 34–36), which was an Achaemenid site, Shapur mentions his ancestors as "ahenagan" of the great King in a con-

Certain parallels between the Sasanid and Achaemenid inscriptions, such as the use of themes and language, point to the presence of a means of transmission of information, either through oral tradition or in other ways.⁸ If true, this would mean that the Sasanids, along with the Manichaeans, used a common store of literary phrases and expressions which might go back even to pre-Achaemenid times.⁹ The existence of an oral tradition is not far-fetched, either. In the 6th century Dinon mentioned that during the Median period there existed court poets who composed epics.¹⁰ According to Strabo, Persian boys were educated by the wisest men, who used mythical stories rehearsed with songs at times about the deeds of gods and the noblest men.¹¹ Xenophon states that in his time Cyrus's character and personal qualities were still the subject of stories and songs amongst the Persians.¹² Herodotus (Book 1.95) relates that there were many tales about Cyrus's birth and youth.¹³ Why would these songs and stories have been forgotten when the Yashts were recited over the centuries by Persians through the Sasanid times in Persis itself? It seems likely that these legends and stories would have continuously existed at least in the Persian cultural milieu, Parsa.¹⁴

Certain parallels, such as the Arsacid use of Achaemenid titulature, further suggest that the former were aware of the latter. This seems likely because the Arsacids were much closer to the Achaemenids in time. The use of the title "king of kings" after 38 B.C. suggests a continuity rather than a loss of the memory of the Achaemenids.¹⁵ With regard to descent from the Achaemenids, the Arsacids made the same claim as the Sasanids.¹⁶ There is also evidence during the Arsacid period of professional minstrels transmitting the stories of the Achaemenid kings.¹⁷ Thus there seems to be a continuity of information attesting to the remembrance of the Achaemenids.

text which denotes the Achaemenids (*Idea of Iran*, 119). This, however, has not been proven for certain.

8. P. O. Skjærvø, "Thematic and Linguistic Parallels In the Achaemenian and Sassanian Inscriptions," *Acta Iranica* 11 (1985): 593.

9. *Ibid.*, 603.

10. I. Gershevitch, "Old Iranian Literature," in *Handbuch der Orientalistik*, Band 2, Iranistik-Literatur (Leiden and Cologne, 1968), 2.

11. Strabo, *Geography* (Cambridge, 1930), 15.3.18.

12. Xenophon, *Cyropaedia* (Cambridge, 1925), I.ii.1.

13. H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg, "The Death Of Cyrus," *Acta Iranica* 11 (1985): 462.

14. M. Boyce, "Some Remarks on the Transmission of the Kayanian Heroic Cycle" in *Serta Cantabrigiensia, Studies Presented to the XXII International Congress of Orientalists* (Mainz, 1954), 49; *idem*, "The Parthian gōsān and Iranian Minstrel Tradition," *JRAS* (1957): 12.

15. Gnoli, *Idea of Iran*, 117.

16. *Ibid.*, 118.

17. M. Boyce, "Some Remarks," *passim*; *idem*, "Parthian gōsān," 12.

Judeo-Christian Sources

Given the unlikely supposition that the Sasanids were uninformed or misinformed about the Achaemenids, it is astonishing that no one has argued that the Jews living in the empire would have informed the rulers. While the Sasanids did at times inflict hardship on the Jewish community,¹⁸ generally speaking their reign was a peaceful time for the Jews, especially when compared to the plight of the Christian community in Iran.¹⁹ Talmudic sources state that during the reign of Yazdgird I (339–420), the Jews were particularly well received by the Sasanids and enjoyed a degree of proximity to the imperial dynasty. It is also said that Yazdgird addressed the rabbis with courtesy, cited scriptures to them, and married a Jewess.²⁰ Whether all of this is true or not, it does point to an atmosphere of tolerance and interaction. Stories such as the one by Elissaus according to which Yazdgird II (438–457) studied all the religions of his realm suggest that the Persians must have come across, or been told by the rabbis, the stories of the Bible regarding the Persians and the treatment of the Jews by the Achaemenids.²¹ For the Jews Cyrus remained a towering figure in their writings, from the Book of Isaiah to the Talmud, from the Midrash to Judeo-Persian texts.²²

Another probable avenue of transmission was by way of contact with the Christian Armenians and Nestorians. A Nestorian ecclesiastical document dated 544 calls Khosrow I the “new Cyrus.”²³ These Christians, who lived outside the Eastern Roman empire, gradually began to use their own vernacular. The Bible, translated into their respective languages, made it possible for them to transmit scriptural stories regarding the Achaemenid Persians. Beginning in the fifth century, for example, the Armenians translated many Greek and other works into their own vernacular.²⁴ Syriac, and more remotely Albanian, literature also followed the same process. When Armenia was under occupation by the Sasanids, contacts were inevitable and there was cultural interaction.

18. J. Neusner, “Jews In Iran,” in *Cambridge History* 3(2):909–923.

19. A. Christensen, *L'Iran sous les Sassanides* (Tehran, 1993), 363.

20. Neusner, “Jews in Iran,” 915; J. Duchesne-Guillemin, “Zoroastrian Religion,” in *Cambridge History* 3(2):889.

21. *Ibid.*, 890. For biblical information on the Persians see: 2 Chronicles 35, 22; Ezra 1, 4:5 for Cyrus, 4:7 for Artaxerxes, 4:24, 5, 6–8 for Darius, Ezra 7:1, 7:7, 7:11, 7:21 for Artaxerxes; also Nehemiah 2:1–4, 5:5:14; Esther 1:1–10, Daniel 5:24–29, 6.

22. A. Netzer, “Some Notes on the Characterization of Cyrus the Great in Jewish and Judeo-Persian Writings,” *Acta Iranica, Hommage Universel* (1974): 35.

23. Chabot, *Synodicon Orientale*, 69–70 as quoted in G. Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth: Consequences of Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (Princeton, 1993), 29, 122.

24. Translations continued until the Arab invasions in the seventh century, when this process was slowed. See G. A. Bournoutian, *A History of the Armenian People* (Costa Mesa, 1993), 1:72.

Moses Khorenats'i mentions Cyrus several times in his history.²⁵ He states: “He (Tigran) assisted Cyrus in overthrowing the dominion of the Medes.”²⁶ In Book II he mentions Cyrus's campaign against Lydia and gives the names of some of the Achaemenid kings: Cyrus, Darius, Cambyses, and Xerxes.²⁷ Thus, the transmission of biblical stories would have been very possible, either through the Jews, who perceived the time of the Achaemenids as one of royal protection, or the Christians.

Islamic Sources

There are Muslim sources that show that knowledge about the Achaemenids, albeit sometimes vague, survived. Ibn al-Balkhi mentions Cyrus as the one who freed the Jews and defeated the last Assyrian king.²⁸ Cyrus's name is recorded as Kersh, but it is certain that this must be Kurosh/Cyrus.²⁹ Hamza al-Isfahani mentions Cyrus, identifies him with Bahman, and states that the Jews believed that in their language he was to be identified as Cyrus.³⁰ Mas'udi also states that the name of Cyrus was known to the Jews, while the Iranians knew him as Bahman.³¹ The most elaborate genealogy of the Achaemenids is given by Biruni. If one follows the genealogy closely, one sees how he equates Keyanid names with Achaemenid ones.³² Here, in an attempt to match the Keyanids with the Achaemenids, Biruni has fused them together and produced an exact Achaemenid genealogy. If the Muslims knew this information, having obtained it from Jewish or classical sources, it would be hard to believe that the Sasanids could not have had access to it.

25. Moses Khorenats'i, *History of the Armenians*, trans. R. W. Thomson (Cambridge, 1978), Book I.25; I.31.

26. *Ibid.*, Book I.24:113.

27. *Ibid.*, Book II.13.

28. Ibn al-Balkhi, *Fārsnāma*, ed. G. Le Strange, 2nd impr. (Tehran, 1363 Sh./1984), 54.

29. Tabari, *Tārīkh al-rusul wa al-mulūk* (Tehran, 1363 Sh./1984), 460, also mentions Cyrus as Kersh, which means Ibn al-Balkhi could have taken his information from Tabari.

30. Hamza al-Isfahani, *Tārīkh mulūk al-ard wa al-anbiyā'* (Tehran, 1368 Sh./1989), 38, 91.

31. Mas'udi, *al-Tanbīh wa al-ishrāf* (Tehran, 1365 Sh./1986), 181.

32. Abu Rayhan al-Biruni, *Āthār al-baqīya* (Tehran, 1363 Sh./1984). Cyrus is mentioned several times, though not as an Achaemenid, in 3:23, 26, 29; 6:153, 177; 8:297.

The Nature of Religion under the Sasanids

With the accession of Ardashir I in the third century the Sasanids began a campaign to create a religio-political entity named Iran.³³ Like any propaganda enti-

The Keyanids and their Achaemenid counterparts, as given in Biruni's genealogy

Keyanid	Achaemenid
Kurosh as Kay Khosrow	Cyrus
Ghuros as Luhrasp	Cyrus*
Gambozius	Cambyses
Dara II	Darius I†
Akhshayush b. Dara as Khosrow I	Xerxes I
Ardashir b. Akhshayush as Bemagrash	Artaxerxes I‡
Khosrow II	Xerxes II
Soghd Natus b. Khosrow	Darius II§
Ardashir b. Dara II	Artaxerxes II
Ardashir III	Artaxerxes III
Artes b. Akhus	Artes or Arsha
Dara	Darius III

* Ghuros as Kurosh/Cyrus is erroneous.

† Dara II is confused with Darius I (522–468 B.C.). In many sources, native or classical, the two Dariuses are confused.

‡ Biruni states that Ardashir was known as "long hand" which is his title in the classical sources, "Longimanus."

§ Soghd Natus b. Khosrow is Darius II if we look at the second element of the name Natus. According to the classical sources, in the Achaemenid genealogy Darius II's title is "Nothus."

ty, this complex socio-religio-political machine required an ideology and view of history. Zoroastrianism, the official state religion of the Sasanids, was the chief ideological or propaganda vehicle in the empire. In time the *mobeds* began to exert much influence over every facet of life, social, administrative, and cultural.

Under the Sasanids, Zoroastrianism came to have the semblance of a religious institution, although it is not clear how far this institution developed before the end of the empire. The career of Kerdir, the *hērbed* who lived in the early period of the empire, and the works and offices which he assumed demonstrate the growth of the religious institution and the power of the *mobeds*. Under Shapur I (241–272) he held a simple priestly office, *hērbed*. His assumption of more important titles under the next several Sasanid kings shows the degree of influence that he and institutionalized Zoroastrianism began to exert.³⁴ Kerdir's inscriptions demonstrate the growing power of religious officials in the early

33. Gnoli, *Idea of Iran*, concluding chapter.

34. R. N. Frye, "The Middle Persian Inscription of Kartir at Naqsh-e Rostam," *Indo-Iranian Journal* (1965): 219; P. Gignoux, *Les Quatres inscriptions du mage Kirdir, texte et concordances*, Association pour l'Avancement des Études Iraniennes, *Studia Iranica Cahier* 9 (Paris, 1991), 38–39.

history of the empire, as well as his efforts to spread and organize Zoroastrianism by the establishment of fire temples inside and outside Iran. The process of arriving at uniformity in Zoroastrian dogma was begun, and all priests were brought into one desirable religious order which supported the state.

Under Shapur II (309–339) Zoroastrian orthodoxy manifested itself in its fullest measure.³⁵ The establishment of the office of chief *mobed* (*mobed mobedān*), according to the Syriac sources in the fourth century, is also attributable to Shapur II's reign.³⁶ It seems that it was during his reign and under the guidance of Adurbad Mahrspandan that one sect of Zoroastrianism was accepted by the Sasanids and religious officials became influential in administration, law and government.³⁷ The religious institution increased in power gradually. The *Letter of Tansar* has valuable passages that attest to the power of the priests in the sixth century.³⁸ This must have increased their influence in the representation of the empire's past as well as its contemporary history.

Thus, when it came to the composition of the "royal history," or the *Xwadāy-nāmag*, the Zoroastrian priests had great influence.³⁹ This account must have been acceptable to the Zoroastrian view of history. Since Zoroastri-

35. Frye, *History Of Ancient Iran*, 313. For the meaning of Sasanid orthodoxy see R. C. Zaehner, *The Dawn and Twilight of Zoroastrianism* (London, 1961), 175–92 (chap. 8: "In Search of an Orthodoxy").

36. Frye, *History of Ancient Iran*, 313. The existence of a supreme *mobed* is attested in Syriac sources in A.D. 358 (in Adiabene; Syriac "rēshā de maupātē" = "head of the *mobeds*"). S.v. *EI*², "Mobadh" (M. Morony).

37. M. Shaki, "The Denkard Account of the History of the Zoroastrian Scriptures," *Archive Orientalni* 49 (1981): 119; Zaehner, *Dawn and Twilight*, 176; s.v. *EIR*, "Adurbad-i Mahrspandan" (A. Tafazzoli). Agathias, *The Histories* (Berlin and New York, 1975), II.26.5, attests to the power of the *mobeds* in the sixth century: "Nowadays, however, the Magi are the object of extreme awe and veneration, all public business being conducted at their discretion and in accordance with their prognostications, and no litigant or party to a private dispute fails to come under their jurisdiction. Indeed nothing receives the stamp of legality in the eyes of the Persians unless it is ratified by one of the Magi." See Fowden, *Empire*, 32.

38. M. Boyce, *The Letter Of Tansar* (Rome, 1968). According to the letter, when the king of kings died there would be a council that would choose a king. This cannot be a third-century idea because the Zoroastrian clergy could not have exerted so much influence and power in early Sasanid history. The letter states only that if the *mobed mobedān*'s opinion was in accord with the other two, then there would be a decision. If the *mobed mobedān*'s opinion was different, there would be no decision until he and other *mobeds* and *hērbeds* made a determination. What is important is the proclamation given by the *mobed mobedān*. Here again the tradition of kingship is given according to Zoroastrianism. The *mobed mobedān* would ask, "Do you accept the kingship from God Almighty (glory be to his name) according to the religion of Zoroaster, upheld by the King of Kings, Gushtasp son of Luhrasp, and restored by Ardashir son of Papak?" (p. 62). For the title of *mobed mobedān* in the text see M. Minoi, *Nāma-yi Tansar* (Tehran, 1352 Sh./1973), 88.

39. For a discussion of the nature of the *Xwadāy-nāmag* and the *Shāhnāma*, and of the *Shāhnāma* being a product of oral poetic tradition besides the Sasanid official record, see O. Davidson, *Poet and Hero in the Persian Book of Kings* (Ithaca and London, 1994), 3, 42, 45, 55, 79–80, 169.

anism provided the basic moral and intellectual foundation for a concept of history written by priests, the records of dynasties and events must have been shaped by Zoroastrian ideals regardless of historical fact.⁴⁰ According to the *Letter Of Tansar* the kings who preserved the Zoroastrian religion were the traditional rulers named in the Avesta and Middle Persian literature, namely, the Keyanid Vishtaspa and Ardashir, the founder of the Sasanid dynasty.⁴¹ This also shows an attempt by the Sasanids to relate themselves to the Keyanids.

The Use of Keyanid Names and Titles by the Sasanids

It is interesting that the Avestan title "kay" was used by the Sasanids for the first time under Shapur II (309–379), attesting the *Dēnkard's* claim that Avestan ideas, titles, and institutions were consolidated under him.⁴² Kay, however, did not come into full use until the reign of Yazdgird II (439–457). It is from this time onwards that most of the Sasanid kings began using the title on their coins.⁴³ This shows an important change in the ideology of the Sasanids and their regard for their past. The full adoption of Keyanid names, titles and ideas from the Avesta hints at the spread and institutionalization of the Keyanid legends and Sasanid Zoroastrianism in the empire. By Kavad's reign (488–531), Keyanid names and legends had become a main component of Sasanid ideology, Kavad (Av. Kauuata) itself being a Keyanid name.⁴⁴ In fact, three of his sons had Keyanid names: Key Ka'us (Av. Kauui Usadan), Key Khosrow (Av. Kauui Haosrauua), and Key Siavash (Av. Kauui Siiauuarshan).⁴⁵

In the Avesta there are nine rulers who have the Keyanid epithet: Kauui Kauuata, Kauui Aipi.Vohum, Kauui Usadan, Kauui Arshn, Kauui Pisina, Kauui Biiarshan, Kauui Siiauuarshan, Kauui Haosrauua, and Kauui Vishtaspa, the last being Zoroaster's royal patron.⁴⁶ Of the thirteen remaining Sasanid kings, five had Keyanid names, which again shows the Avestan influence on the Sasanids.

In the *Shāhnāma* and Zoroastrian sources such as the *Bundahišn* and the *Dēnkard* Darius III (Daray-i Darayan) is the only Achaemenid mentioned. Why is he the only one among the Achaemenid kings to be remembered? In the *Dēnkard* Dara is said to have arranged for two copies of the Avesta to be made. The question is which Darius is intended by this reference. Darius I's Mazda-worshipping tendency is quite clear. In his Behistun inscription he mentions

40. Yarshater, "Iranian National History," 367; M. Boyce, "Middle Persian Literature," in *Handbuch der Orientalistik* (Leiden and Cologne, 1968), 38, 58; idem, *Zoroastrianism, Its Antiquity and Constant Vigour* (Costa Mesa, 1992), 18; O. Klima, *Beiträge zur Geschichte des Mazdakismus* (Prague, 1977), 42–43.

41. Boyce, *Letter of Tansar*, 62.

42. Frye, *History Of Ancient Iran*, 320.

43. D. J. P. Furdoonjee, *Sasanian Coins* (New Delhi, 1976), 366.

44. A. Christensen, *Les Kayanides* (Copenhagen, 1931), 40.

45. Ibid.

46. Yasht 19.71 gives seven of the Keyanid names (Christensen, *Les Kayanides*, 18).

Ahura Mazda sixty-nine times and states thirty-four times that he received his aid in his exploits.⁴⁷ The Magophonia episode, however, would have made Darius I infamous among the Magi, prompting them to ascribe his good works to Darius III.⁴⁸ At the same time, in an attempt to erase the origin of the event, his evil deeds were attributed to Alexander.⁴⁹

The Nature of Historiography during Late Antiquity

Here it must be asked why was history, the memory of a people, written? By whom, and in memory of whom? Armenian histories such as Moses Khorenats'i's and Islamic histories such as Tabari's tend to be universal, as does the *Shāhnāma*. It must be remembered that Armenian and Iranian historiography are different from their Islamic counterpart in that the first two tend to be homogeneous, while the latter is a record of the memory of all people—Jews, Arabs, Turks, and Persians. But their commonality is that they all view history from a religious world view or what could be termed sacred historiography. Zoroastrian historiography used the Avesta, much as the Armenians used the Bible and the Muslims the Qur'an, as the foundation of their world view; history was revealed in sacred texts. Thus they all contained a religious view of history.

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.⁵⁰ These ecclesiastical histories were not unique to Armenia but were the general trend in late antiquity and in Iranian historiography as well. The Zoroastrians wrote their history in a Zoroastrian context, just as the Armenians and Muslims wrote theirs in Christian and Muslim contexts, respectively, the underlying commonality being their religious view of events.

Moses Khorenats'i's history shows the accommodation of Armenia's ancient history and pagan past with what Thomson calls a "Christian orientation." Tabari and other Muslim historians start their books as described in the Qur'an. 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 the Armenian tastes in late antiquity.⁵¹ The same should be argued for Iranian historiography. What seemed pagan and contrary to the taste of the *mobeds* in late antiquity was omitted, and what was in accord with Zoroastrianism was kept. Thus, their history was given a "Zoroastrian orientation" and started as described in the Avesta.

47. M. A. Dandamaev and V. G. Lukonin, *The Culture and Social Institutions of Ancient Iran* (Cambridge, 1989), 339.

48. For the Magophonia episode see W. B. Henning, "The Murder of the Magi," *JRAS* (1943): 136. H. Humbach identifies Darius III in the *Dēnkard* with Darius I (*The Gāthās of Zarathushtra* [Heidelberg, 1991], 51).

49. Henning, "Murder of the Magi," 136.

50. R. W. Thomson, "Armenian Literature," 4.

51. Ibid., 29.

The Muslims used the same outlook when they began writing universal histories. But their accounts of people's memory was much more multi-faceted than Armenian and Iranian historiography. In the early Islamic era, history was shaped by a religious outlook in the form of prophetic history. The Qur'an served as the basis and framework of Islamic history, as the Avesta had done for Iranian history. Avestan dynasties such as the Keyanids and the Pishdadians replaced the Achaemenids and Arsacids. The traditional dynasts in the Avesta became the traditional kings of Iran.

Byzantine historiography took on the same characteristics in the sixth century when historians began showing their subjects within a biblical framework rather than in the classical style.⁵² Even contemporary events and struggles took on a religious coloring. During the Sasanid-Byzantine conflict in the seventh century Khosrow II and Heraclius were identified with a villain and a hero in the Bible.⁵³ By the fourth century Christian historiography had become distinct, with a Christian outlook, while looking to the classics for its models.⁵⁴ The third-century *Historia Ecclesiastica* of Eusebius can be called one of the first histories written from a religious perspective, where history unfolds in a Christian milieu. Eusebius presented the Christian succession not only of personages and church figures, but also the intellectual, spiritual, and institutional life of the church.⁵⁵ In other words, he gave a religious outlook to the history of mankind.

The Avesta, of course, does not mention the Achaemenids. The question of the Achaemenids' religious leanings towards Zoroastrianism is vague at best. It seems that under the Achaemenids Zoroastrianism never had the organization that it developed under the Sasanids. Scholars are divided over the nature of religion in the Achaemenid period. Most recently Dandamaev and Lukonin have strongly denied that the Achaemenids were Zoroastrian, while Boyce has been the traditional advocate of the Achaemenids' Zoroastrian orthodoxy.

Cyrus's religion is not altogether clear, and he seems to have worshiped every deity of the lands which he conquered. His commitment to Ahura Mazda as the supreme deity has been questioned, and Mithra is thought to have been more important to him.⁵⁶ This sort of characterization would not have been looked upon favorably by the Sasanid *mobeds*. It seems, just as in the Talmudic sources, that Cyrus was thought to have been a pagan due to his religious openness,⁵⁷ and the Sasanids could have had the same view towards him. Religion in the Achaemenid period could very well have been a *mélange* of beliefs. The Achaemenid inscriptions represent Mazda worship as the most important ideology, while the Persepolis fortification tablets record sacrifices to Iranian and non-

52. A. Cameron, "Images of Authority: Elites and Icons in Late Sixth-Century Byzantium," in *Continuity and Change in Sixth-Century Byzantium* (London, 1981), 4.

53. *Ibid.*, 33. Khosrow II appeared as Holophernes and Heraclius as David.

54. A. Cameron, "Christianity and Tradition in the Historiography of the Late Empire," in *Continuity and Change*, 321.

55. Eusebius, *The Ecclesiastical History*, trans. Kirsopp Lake (Cambridge, 1992), xxxiv.

56. Gnoli, *Idea of Iran*, 84.

57. Netzer, "Some Notes," 51.

Iranian deities. Iranian subjects such as Mardonius made sacrifices to non-Iranian deities.⁵⁸ More sacrifices were made to Humban, the supreme Elamite god, than to any other.⁵⁹ Practices such as the cult of fire, which at first may seem peculiarly Zoroastrian, could simply be other forms of common Indo-Iranian worship. It is very difficult to distinguish the Zoroastrian elements from the Indo-Iranian, mainly due to the fact that Zoroastrianism is a product of the Indo-Iranian religion and Zoroaster was a modifier of the old religion. Also, certain practices such as the burial of the dead and sacrifice of humans, which are nonexistent in Zoroastrianism, were practiced by the Achaemenids.⁶⁰

The main problem concerns the meaning of "Zoroastrianism" during the Achaemenid and Sasanid periods. Again, Zoroastrianism under the Achaemenids never had the structure that it would have under the Sasanids; old Iranian deities, especially Mithra and Ahura Mazda were worshiped, as were non-Iranian gods.⁶¹ The political motivations of the Achaemenids fostered an environment of religious syncretism.⁶² At that time Zoroastrianism did not have a Kerdir or Adurbad Mahrspandan and its practice as a religion was more fluid than under the Sasanids.⁶³ Without denying outright the existence of Zoroastrianism under the Achaemenids, it is reasonable to argue that the modern concept of a "Zoroastrian religion" did not exist then.⁶⁴ Gnoli has made the best study of the development of Zoroastrianism from its inception to the end of the Sasanid period.⁶⁵ He argues that one should not look at religion in a homeostatic way; rather, one should view all the influences that shaped it through the stages of its evolution.

Thus, with the exception of the reign of Darius I, whose Zoroastrian religiosity is evident, and the memory of the last Achaemenid king, Darius III, nothing important took place under the Achaemenid kings for Zoroastrianism worth remembering in Sasanid times. Perhaps the *mobeds* of the Sasanid period never perceived the Achaemenids as people of the "good religion" (*weh-dēnān*).

58. Richard T. Hallock, *Persepolis Fortification Tablets* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1969), 153 (E texts: utilization PF 348).

59. Dandamaev and Lukonin, *Culture and Social Institutions*, 341.

60. S. H. Nyberg, *Die Religionen des alten Iran* (Osnabrück, 1966), 363.

61. Gnoli, *Idea of Iran*, 84; *idem*, *Zoroaster's Time and Homeland* (Rome, 1981), 211.

62. Gnoli, *Zoroaster's Time*, 214.

63. *Ibid.*, 222. Gnoli argues correctly that Zoroastrian orthodoxy began with the Sasanids.

64. Frye, *History of Ancient Iran*, 120; M. M. Diakonov, *The History of Ancient Persia* (Tehran, 1968), 17. Frye believes that the religion of the Achaemenids was a mixture of the old Indo-Iranian beliefs and Zoroastrianism, with influences from the religions, priests and practices of the Ancient Near East (p. 121). Earlier G. Cameron had expressed the same sentiment, minus the Near Eastern element: "Thus the court religion of the Achaemenid kings would seem to have been a fourth Iranian religion existing at the side of Magism, Mithraism, and Zoroastrianism, independent of all yet sharer in all" (G. Cameron, *Persepolis Treasury Tablets* [Chicago, 1948], 9).

65. Gnoli, *Zoroaster's Time*, particularly chap. 7.

In late antiquity history was written in a scriptural-religious context, a trend that the Achaemenids did not foster. In Middle Persian literature, the rule of the Achaemenids is embodied in Daray-i Darayan, who probably represents Darius I and the memory of his religious conviction and who was conflated with Darius III, defeated at the hands of Alexander. From among the Arsacids, Valakhsh, who collected the tradition whether oral or written, is mentioned and praised, although the Arsacids were the enemies of the Sasanids.⁶⁶ The next line of kings to receive praise consists of Ardashir I, Shapur I, Shapur II, and Khosrow I.⁶⁷ These were the important kings as far as the *mobeds* were concerned, because they benefited Zoroastrianism.

Thus, in late antiquity we see a trend towards a "sacred historiography" where Keyanid accounts, largely in keeping with the Avesta, provided the Sasanids with annals of Iran's past. The redaction of these histories was overseen by Zoroastrian *mobeds*. Religion has always played a central role in Iran's national life: it encompasses the whole spectrum of social and political endeavor, and this was especially true during the Sasanid period when the national history acquired a religious coloring.⁶⁸

The history of Iran then did not start according to current notions of Iranian history, but with the Avestan view of the origin of the world. Avestan dynasties, the Pishdadians and the Keyanids, became the ancestors of the Sasanids. The Achaemenid Darius I and the Arsacid Valakhsh were remembered, but only because they were considered worthy of remembrance for having patronized the good religion. Iranian national history written during Sasanid times was the history of Iran according to Zoroastrianism. The *Xwadāy-nāmag* was the official Sasanid record as set down by the *mobeds*.⁶⁹

The story of the Achaemenid kings was not forgotten, and oral tradition carried their legends. They were mixed and interchanged with the Keyanids. This transformation of legends is common in other parts of the world. It also seems clear that old traditions and stories can be altered by contemporary political and social changes. The substitution of one ancestor for another in agreement with the new political realities or the assumption of a new "age-old" political symbol are well-attested phenomena.⁷⁰ In this case, a religio-political outlook contributed to the making of a sacred historiography. In the *Kār-nāmag* Ardashir I is not only connected with the Keyanids, he is also said to be from the family (*tōhmag*) of King Dara.⁷¹ As stated in the *Kār-nāmag*, it seems that Ardashir I

66. Frye, *History of Ancient Iran*, 231; Boyce, *Zoroastrianism, Its Antiquity and Constant Vigour*, 135.

67. Shaki, "Denkard Account," 118–19.

68. Yarshater, "Iranian National History," 393–94.

69. S. Shaked, "Administrative Functions of the Priests in the Sasanian Period," in *Proceedings of the First European Conference of Iranian Studies* (Rome, 1990), 1:260; Davidson, *Poet and Hero*, 42–43.

70. Sancisi-Weerdenburg, "Death of Cyrus," 462.

71. B. Farahvashi, ed., *Kār-nāma-yi Ardashir-i Bābakān* (Tehran, 1352 Sh./1973), 33.

was attempting to unify Iran as it had been under the Achaemenids.⁷² This confirms Herodian's view that Ardashir knew of his ancestors and claimed those territories by an assertion of ancestral rights.

It is evident from the external sources we possess that the Sasanid kings mentioned their ancestors and used their memory as a tool for propaganda. By the late-Sasanid period, however, the Sasanids were kings of Iran and did not identify with the Achaemenid kings who were the rulers of Persia. Gnoli has stated that the Sasanid propaganda and political program deliberately used "Iran," not the "Persia" of the Achaemenids.⁷³ What should be noted is that the Sasanid propaganda was inspired by the religious tradition of Zoroastrianism, and the Avesta supplied the historical perspective for the Sasanids in late antiquity.⁷⁴ Thus, there was a gradual replacement of the Achaemenids and Arsacids by the Avestan dynasties in Iran, just as there was a replacement of classical sources by biblical antecedents in Christian historiography as shown in Armenian and Byzantine chronicles. The impact of Keyanid legends became so widespread and popular that Achaemenid sites such as Persepolis (*sad-stūn* according to Sasanid inscription) became Takht-i Jamshid, the throne of *Yima xšaēta* (the shining Yima) of the Yashts.⁷⁵ Finally, through a process of remaking history, Avestan kings became the ancestors of the Sasanids.

Touraj Daryaeae, *Department of History*, University of California at Los Angeles

72. Ibid., 13:19: "Pas az ān ka Ohrmazd ō xwadāyih rasēd, hāmōyēn Ērān-šahr abāz ō ēk-xwadāyih tuwānist āwurdan, ud sar-xwadāyih ī kustag kustag Ohrmazd ō framān būrdārih āwurd" (After Ohrmazd came to lordship, he was once again able to bring Iran back to monarchy and the lord of each district rendered obedience to Ohrmazd). What is significant is the word *abāz*, hinting that at another time—probably the Achaemenid period—all of "Iran-shahr" was united.

73. Gnoli, *Idea of Iran*, 137.

74. Ibid., 144.

75. There seems to be an alteration in Sasanid historical memory. In the Sasanid inscription at Persepolis in the fourth century the name is *sad-stūn*, the palace of one hundred columns. Interestingly, in the Achaemenid period the same name was applied to the structure. In the Persepolis treasury tablets the Elamite name for the structure is *i-ia-an* or "columned hall" (Cameron, *Persepolis Treasury Tablets*, seals 3a, 9, 15, 18, 22, 48a, 77, 79, 83). This shows a continuous remembrance of the name of the site down to Sasanid times. The name Takht-i Jamshid was given to the site perhaps in the records written in the late-Sasanid period or in Islamic times. The impact of Qur'anic legends also brought new names to Sasanid sites, such as the Adur-Gushnasp site which was called Takht-i Sulayman. In the *Bundahishn* the Var of Yima is located by Mount Yamagan (Kuh-i Rahmat). I. Gershevitch concludes that this is the reason why Persepolis came to be called Takht-i Jamshid in the Sasanid period ("An Iranian-ist's View of the Soma Controversy," in P. Gignoux and A. Tafazzoli, eds., *Mémorial Jean de Menasce* [Louvain, 1974], 53, 67).