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IRANIAN IDENTITY IN THE COURSE OF HISTORY

Proceedings of the Conference Held in Rome, 21-24 September 2005

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R O M A

ISTITUTO ITALIANO PER L'AFRICA E L'ORIENTE

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TOURAJ DARYAEE

THE IDEA OF ĒRĀNŠAHR: JEWISH, CHRISTIAN AND MANICHAEAN VIEWS IN LATE ANTIQUITY

The work of the great Italian scholar G. Gnoli has made it clear that the Sasanian Empire (224-651 CE) brought about the formation of a territory which was called *Ērānšahr*, “The Territory of the Aryans/Iranians”, and the people, *Ērān* or “Iranians”, who lived in it¹. If we are to follow Gnoli’s conception, the Sasanians reached into their religious tradition and transposed the mythical Iranian homeland onto the Iranian Plateau in Late Antiquity. That is, an archaic religious tradition was revived in a new territory (*Ērānšahr*) which *was* to be ruled by the Sasanians². This idea had its roots in the Zoroastrian tradition as contained in the *Avesta*. Thus, we can assume that the Zoroastrian populations were very much in agreement with the conception of such a territory (*Ērānšahr*) who were considered Iranians (*Ērānagān*). The reality of Late Antiquity, however, was that not only were non-Iranians part of the Sasanian Empire, but there were also outer territories captured by Ardaxšīr, Šābuhr I and other kings which were considered to be beyond the traditional borders of Iran. Most important for

* Since this paper was read several important studies have been published on Christianity during the Sasanian period. Most notably see Walker 2006 and McDonough 2008.

¹ Gnoli 1989. Ghoreyši in his Persian book, *Ērān-nāmak* (Tehran, 1371), has discussed the same issue in a more general manner. In the same year, in the second biannual conference of Iranian Studies at Bethesda, Maryland, a symposium was dedicated to this issue under the title “Iranian Cultural Identity”, where E. Yarshater’s brief remarks, “Persian Identity in Historical Perspective”, and especially R.N. Frye’s “Iranian Identity in Ancient Times”, are relevant to our discussion. Frye (1993) in his comments has questioned Gnoli’s suggestion that the idea of *Ērān* or a territorial boundary was solely born in the Sasanian period. He suggests that as early as the Achaemenid period a concept of ethnicity and territory had developed.

² There are objections to Gnoli’s thesis, see Shahbazi 2005. R.N. Frye (2002) has also made some observation on the Achaemenid period.

our study are many non-Zoroastrians, specifically the Jews, Christians and the Manichaeans. In this essay I would like to discuss how the religious “minorities” or “communities” within the Sasanian Empire, specifically the Jews, Christians and Manichaeans, viewed the King of Kings, his rule and the territory which he ruled, i.e., *Ērānšahr*. Also I will show how the imperial apparatus and the ruler may have viewed the people belonging to these religions and whether they were perceived to be Iranians, though they had different religions other than Zoroastrianism.

Naturally we should not look at Sasanian society from the third to the seventh centuries CE as a monolithic and unchanging society. Early Sasanian history is quite different in the interaction between the populations themselves and vis-à-vis the imperial government. Furthermore, by the later half of Sasanian history, Christianity moved toward becoming a dominant religious option for the Iranian population, while Manichaeism, which had become important in the third century CE, was threatened. The Jews as well were susceptible to the political situation inside the empire and the zealotry of the King of Kings. But what is clear is that they existed in the empire and the government had to interact and deal with them.

If we take the idea of *ēr* and *Ērānšahr* to be early on, a specifically Zoroastrian concept, we must then look at the *Avesta*. In the *Avesta*, committed to writing during the Sasanian period, we come across the ethnic epithet *Arya* (*airiia-*) meaning “Noble”. We also see that the *Arya* are an ethnic group who view all other enumerated tribes as *an-Arya* “non-Aryan”, and this is important for the Sasanian period under discussion because as we will see, they transposed their ancient Avestan adversaries onto their neighbors, mainly the Romans and Turks. For example the Roman territory was equated with the land of (Avestan) *sairinam dahyunam* / (Middle Persian) *sarmān dehān* / Greek *sarames*. The *Bundahišn* states *sarm deh ast hrōm* “The land of Sarm is Rome”. In the epic and other Middle Persian texts *Sarm* / *Salm* is known as the eldest son of Frēdōn who was given the land of Rome to rule (Pahlavi Texts 25.5):

*az frazandān ī frēdōn salm kē kišwar ī hrōm ud tur kē turkestān pad
xwadāyīh dāšt ērij ērān dahibed būd uš ōzad.*

From the offsprings of Frēdōn, Salm who (ruled) the country of Rome and Tur who ruled the country of Turkestān, they killed Ērij who was the ruler of Ērān”. (Daryaei 1996: 536, 542).

It is the latter region that receives much more attention because of the *Avesta*’s geographical concerns. These are the Turanians (*tūiriia-*) who were equated with the Turks in the Sasanian period and much of the Persian epic, the *Šāhnāme* deals with the territorial conflicts between the two. The Achaemenid Persians who created the first Persian Empire (550-330 BCE)

also referred to themselves with the same designation. Darius I, in the royal inscriptions, calls himself *ariya ciça* “of Aryan lineage”. It is this ethnic designation that the Sasanian Persians retained or re-created, albeit a half millennium later.

The Zoroastrian religion or tradition is the main leitmotiv behind the concept of *Ērānšahr*. Thus it is not surprising to see that being *arya* / *ēr* in the Zoroastrian Middle Persian texts is equated with being Zoroastrian. The idea that religion is bound to ethnicity in Zoroastrianism is seen in a Middle Persian text dealing with apostasy (*Dādestān ī Dēnīg* 40.1-2):

awēšān kē-šān dād ēd kū pad dēn ī māzdēsnañ āstawānīh nē abāyēd būd ēn pad dād be gōwīhēd dēn ī māzdēsnañ be hilēd dēn abāz stāyēd [ud] bē ō an-ērīh šawēd ēg-iš čē ēwēn u-š wināh čē u-š wināh ī ham-dēnīh [ī] an-ēr abar ōh šawēd ayāb čiyōn bawēd [ud] nakkīrāyīh ī az ēn wināh čiyōn ast ēg-imān rōšnīhā awīš framāyēd guft. Pāsox ēd kū purnāy dēn ī weh be hišt rāy marg-arzān dād ī an-ērīh-iz grift rāy marg-arzān ī-š andar ēstišn pad ān ī abārōn dād wināh-iz ī awēšān pad dād dārēnd [ud] warzēnd ud pad ham-dādīh rāy abāg-išān ham-wināh.

Those whose judgment is this, that one should not believe in the Mazdean religion, in (whose) judgment it is said that (one) should leave the Mazdean religion, and repudiate the religion and follow a non-Iranian (*an-ērīh*) faith; then how is it, and what is their sin? The answer is this, that an adult deserves death for leaving the Good Religion, he deserves death for accepting a non-Iranian religion (*dād ī an-ērīh*); (as for) his belonging to a wrong religion, he also (shares) in the sin which they believe in or do in (their) religion, and on account of having the same religion he is equally sinful with them”. (Jaafari-Dehaghi 1998: 168-69).

We have to remember that this is a post Sasanian text and that it was written in the ninth century CE when the Zoroastrian population had been reduced to a sub-altern community under Muslim rule (Choksy 1997). In fact we find that in the Middle Persian literature the concept *ēr* is further discussed, where not only *ērānagān*³, “Iranians”, but also their traits *ērīh* “Iranianness”, are juxtaposed with *an-ērīh* “non-Iranianness”, and *ēr-mēnišnīh* “Iranian virtue” is set against *an-ēr-mēnišnīh* “non-Iranian virtue” (Gnoli 1989: 147-48). The ethno-genesis of this idea may be found in the Zoroastrian texts, but we see that the concept of belonging or being *ēr* is not unique to Zoroastrian ethnic and religious identity at the end of Late Antiquity. This means that a non-Zoroastrian Persian could have claimed to be an *ēr*. This matter is evident when we find such statements as *mard ī ēr ī*

³ *Ayādgār ī Zarērān*, passage 47, edited and translated by Monchi-Zadeh 1981: 44; Gheybi 1999: 19.

hudēn (*Dādestān ī Dēnīg*, 66.1; Bailey 1987: 682) “Iranian man of good religion”, where the good religion means belonging to the Zoroastrian faith. Other terminology such as *dēn ī weh* “good religion”, and *dēn ī rāstīh* “righteous religion”, is synonymous with the good religion.

Could this mean that there could have been a **mard ī ēr ī agdēn* “Iranian man of evil religion”? This matter cannot be clarified from the Zoroastrian Middle Persian texts, and we must seek out other texts and inscriptions for verification. *Agdēn* “evil religion”, however, is mainly found as a reference to the religion of Islam in the Middle Persian texts and the Christians, for example, are not the focus of the same attacks. This does not, however, mean that the Christian community was safe from persecution. For this we can see the inscription of the famous Zoroastrian priest, Kerdīr, in the third century CE where he boasts to have persecuted the following people:

*ud jahūd ud šaman ud brāman ud nāsrā ud kristiyān ud makdag ud zandīk
andar šahr zad bawēnd.*

And Jews and Buddhists and Hindus and Nazarenes and Christians and Baptists and Manichaeans were smitten in the empire. (Back 1978: 414; Gignoux 1991: 9).

While Kerdīr is certainly biased toward non-Zoroastrians, we find another term generally used for Christians in Middle Persian texts. The term *tarsāgān* “reverent ones” which can also be translated as “God fearing ones”, carries a positive connotation which may have been used for the Christians by those who were not as antagonistic as Kerdīr. In the inscription of Kerdīr we find that both the native Christians (Middle Persian *nāsrā* from Syriac *naṣrāyē*) and captured Roman Christians (Middle Persian *kristiyān* from Syriac *kreṣtyānē*) are mentioned⁴. But by the end of the fourth and the beginning of the fifth century there was close relation between the Christian church of Persia and the Sasanian state (Brock 1982: 3-4). By the time of the synod of Seleucia in 410 CE, we know that six metropolitan sees and over thirty bishoprics existed in the Sasanian empire (*ibid.*: 3), a fact that attests to the number of the Christians, something that would not have escaped the attention of the ruler. This would have meant the king would not have taken the same position as the Zoroastrian priests in regard to Christian loyalties, especially after the fourth century CE, when a Christian Persian church was recognized by the Sasanian state.

While Sebastian Brock may be correct in his observation that the Christians had a nebulous fate under the Sasanians, one could argue that it

⁴ It is also noteworthy that the Byzantines are mentioned in some Middle Persian texts as *kilisāyīg* and their dwelling at *yōnān* “Greece”.

was really the third and fourth centuries CE that were most troublesome. From the fifth century CE onwards the nature of the “Christian problem” was not so much an imperial problem, which seemed to have been in the first two centuries, but rather a “Zoroastrian” church problem because the imperial government had recognized the Christians as a religious group and their numbers were growing. In fact we may contend that an Iranian Christianity had been shaped by the beginning of the fifth century CE, where the name of the bishops who attended the synods were Iranian such as Ādur-Hormizd, Dādāfrīd, Hormizd, Mihr-bōzīd, Mihr-Narsēh and Mihr-Hormizd (Williams 1996: 39). In fact after the fourth century CE, we rarely hear of great Christian persecutions (*ibid.*: 40). The one outstanding post fourth century pogrom was during the rule of Yazdgerd II. However, we should remember that this was in retaliation for the destruction of a fire-temple by the Christians (*ibid.*). In the post fifth century accounts, primarily Syriac martyrologies, it is the individuals who initiate persecution and death. If we read the accounts closely it becomes clear that it is not the king and/or imperial apparatus that commits these punishments, but often the *mowbed*, or priest, who either he himself or someone on his insistence puts a Christian to death⁵. Furthermore, one should be weary in taking the Syriac martyrologies at face value, as their intention is not to provide an accurate historical situation, but rather an extreme embellishment of the event (*ibid.*: 46). Thus, we should conclude that the imperial government and the King of Kings should not be seen as the instigators of Christian persecutions from the fifth century onward.

By the 5th century CE for the king, the non-Zoroastrians along with the Zoroastrian masses, were seen as *mard/zan ī šahr* “male/female (citizen) of the empire”. They would have also been seen as *ērān šahrīgān* “residents of Ērān” juxtaposed with *an-ērān šahrīgān* “non-residents of Ērān”, i.e., the foreigners. We also come across this division among the slaves, where the *bandag ī šahr* “resident slave”, according to Zoroastrian law, was dealt with differently than the *bandag ī an-šahrīg* “foreign slave” (Shaki 1992: 632-33). Thus the imperial (legal) outlook was somewhat different from that of the Zoroastrian views of citizenship, *ērīh*, and ethnicity. Šābuhr I (240-270 CE), who was the king of Ērān, already in the third century experimented with the idea of a universal religion. Manī, whose religion Šābuhr I saw as attractive, was to lay victim to this experimentation (Hinz 1970). As Rome would claim Christianity as a universal religion in the fourth century CE, Šābuhr in the third century CE had also looked for such an idea in Manichaeism. This fact goes to show that according to the king, the

⁵ For a good number of examples see Brock & Harvey 1998: 63-99.

Sasanian Empire (*Ērānšahr*) could have had another religion in addition to that of Zoroastrianism. As W. Hinz stated four decades ago, “with the exception of Bahrām II, all of the Sasanian kings of the third century were but lukewarm Zoroastrians” (*ibid.*: 493). Thus in the fourth century we have two competing views of *Ērānšahr*: one religious, based on the Zoroastrian religion, and the other imperial perhaps making ethnicity the major priority over religion.

To see how non-Zoroastrians viewed the idea of *ērīh*, we can look at the Jewish community of this time. Even though the information comes from Mesopotamia we get a good perspective of Jewish life and its integration with the Persians. The *Babylonian Talmud*, along with the evidence from the Dura synagogue, demonstrates the fact that Jews had the ability to and did become part of Persian life and citizenship of the Sasanian state (*mard ī šahr*). They took Persian names, wore the high Persian hats (*kulāf*), and even the leader of the Jewish community (Middle Persian) *reš galūt* wore the belt (*kamar*) which was the sign of status and authority among the Persians (Neusner 1975: 187-88). As Neusner has suggested, the criticism by the Palestinian Jews of the “outlandish” costumes of certain Persian Jews demonstrates that there were Jews who were part of the imperial administration and Persian life (*ibid.*: 188).

While this only shows an interaction on one level, we can also find more interaction on a different level. A large number of magic bowls exists from the end of Late Antiquity originating in the Sasanian Empire. The language of these texts is mainly Aramaic, but that does not always provide ethnic designation of the maker of the bowl, nor the buyer. Michael Morony has discussed the fact that the religious population was quite mixed, at least in the Western part of the Sasanian Empire. The names mentioned on these bowls show Jewish, Zoroastrian and Christian designation, and are sometimes mixed within the same text (Morony 2004: 95). But it has been shown that on the Aramaic bowls, the angels invoked tend to be dominantly Jewish (Harvianien 1995). Were the Jews responsible for the creation of these magic bowls? Anyone familiar with the tradition of magic in Iran knows that it was the Jews that the population at large relied on for help⁶. This means interaction on a popular level between the Jewish and non-Jewish population on the Western part of the Iranian plateau⁷. Morony has also shown that at least

⁶ For an example see the very interesting text by A. bin Barkhīyā, *Haftād o do dēw*. The text mentions how King Solomon was able to call on 72 demons to see what they do and how people can get away from their maladies.

⁷ For the influence of Jewish angelology and demonology in the Iranian world and beyond see Schwartz 2002.

in the Sasanian province of Āsurestān, there were Jews and non-Jews living in the same households (Morony 2004: 94-95).

It would then be plausible that Jews within the heartland of Persia, in Xūzestān, Fārs, and Media, would have considered themselves part of the state and loyal subjects, thus *ēr*. In a sense it was in Sasanian Persia that a Jew was considered *Arya* / *ēr* by the state. We should, however, remember that the Jewish community, like other religious communities in Late Antiquity, viewed others as outsiders and the populations based on their religious conviction at large would have been somewhat isolated from one another. But for the State this would not be so. In fact both the Jews and Christians were recognized as viable religious communities or, to use the Ottoman terminology, recognized *millets*. Others such as the Manichaean community were not as fortunate and, as we shall see, they would perceive the issue of ethnicity and the concept of *Ērān* differently.

When dealing with boundaries and limits of the Sasanian Persian Empire we tend to find a confusing picture⁸. This is because the Classical sources tend to supply one set of notions about Persian borders which is different from royal inscriptions and Middle Persian texts. According to Ammianus Marcellinus, Herodian and Zonaras, the Sasanians were trying to revive the Achaemenid empire and restore the old Persian imperial borders (Herodian 4.2.2; Dio Cassius 483; Ammianus Marcellinus 27.4-6). The Sasanian royal inscriptions give us an alternative view which is based on the political realities, while the inscription of Kerdīr supplies an ethnic (belonging to *ēr*)

⁸ There are several texts which demarcate the Eastern boundaries of *Ērān*. For example in the *Šahrestānihā ī Ērānšahr* it is stated (8-9): *andar baxl ī *bāmīg šahrestān [ī] nawāzag spandyād ī wištāspān pus kard. u-š warzāwand ātaxš wahrām ānōh nišāst u-š nēzag ī xwēš ānōh be zad u-š ō yabbu xāgān ud sinjēbīk xāgān ud čōl xāgān ud wuzurg xā[gā]n ud gōhram ud tuzāb ud arzāsp ī xiyōnān-šāh paygām frēstēd kū ō nēzag ī man be nigerēd har kē pad wazišn ī ēn nēzag nigerēd čē andar ō ērān-šahr dwārēd.* “In the brilliant Balx, the city of Nawāzag was built by Spandyād, the son of Wištāsp. And he set the miraculous Wahrām fire there and struck his lance there and he sent a message to Yabbu Xāgān, Sinjēbīk Xāgān, and Čōl Xāgān and the Great Xāgān and Gohram and Tuzāb and Arzāsp, the king of the Hayōns: ‘behold my lance; whoever beholds the movement of this lance is like they have rushed to Iran’”. So in this passage a lance is used as a mark for a boundary and Balx is the limit. In the *Wižīdagihā ī Zādšpram* (edited and translated by Gignoux & Tafazzoli 1993) we have another older and archaic view of the Eastern boundary of *Ērān*: where Nawāzag is seen as the *sāmān* “border” which, according to the text (4.10): *sāmān ī ērān ud tūrān pad nibīštag abar sumb paydāg būd.* “The border of *Ērān* and *Tūrān* was written and manifest on its hoof”. Still another story is in regard to the Aryan archer Āraš who, according to the Persian Muslim author Bērūnī (*Athār al-Bāghīya*: 220), shot an arrow to demarcate the limits of *Ērān* and *Tūrān*. His shot struck a walnut tree somewhere between Faragana and Tabaristān with the aid of Spandarmad (in the *Frawardīn Yašt* with the aid of Ohrmazd). This day was celebrated by the Persians as the day of *Tīr rōz* or *Tīragān*, Safā 1374: 568.

view of the boundary. Still the Middle Persian, along with some Persian texts, gives us a totally different picture of boundaries. This last definition of boundary is imbued with Persian mythical view of the world which needs to be delineated in order to understand the complexity of the issue of boundary in Late Antique Iran.

According to the Avestan hymn to the deity Mithra (*Mihr Yašt*), we see that the world is divided into seven climes or tracts (Avestan *karšuuar* / (Middle Persian) *kišwar* which are (X.15): 1) Arəzahī; 2) Savahī; 3) Fradaḏafšu; 4) Vidaḏfšu 5) Vouru.barəštī; 6) Vouru.jarəštī; and 7) Xvaniraθa (Gershevitch 1959: 80-81). This is the earliest complete list of the seven climes/tracts of the world supplied in the *Avesta* (see also *Rašn Yašt* 15-19; *Vendidād* XIX.39; *Vispered* X.1). We know this division is as old as the time of Zoroaster since in Yasna 32.3, he mentions *būmiiā haptaiθē* “the seventh world” (Humbach 1991:132). In India as well we come across such a division where the world is divided into seven regions, (Sanskrit) *dvīpa*, which should convince us that the seven-partite division of the world is of Indo-Iranian origin⁹. The shape of these climes according to Sasanian sources, specifically the *Bundahišn*, is as such: *nēm-ē mayān (ud) šaš pārag pērāmōn* “one half in the middle and six parts around”. The location of each of these *kišwars* is given in the following manner:

pārag-ē pad kust ī xwarāsān sawah kišwar (pārag-ē pad kust ī) xwarwarān arzah kišwar, dō pārag pad kust ī nēmrōz fradaḏafš ud widadaḏfš kišwar, dō pārag pad kust ī abāxtar wōrūbaršt wōrūjaršt kišwar dō pārag ān ī mayān xwanirah.

The part in the Northeast direction is the clime of Sawah, the part in the Southwest direction is the clime of Arzah, two parts are in the Southeastern

⁹ Boyce 1989: 134. G. Dumézil (1973: 11) stated that the original Persian world-view corresponded to the Indic five climes of the world. The Indic concept of the terrestrial world was that it was divided into five *dīśah* or *pradīśah* regions, corresponding with the Irish use of the word *cóiced* “fifth” to describe the “provinces” of their island. Thus according to him this is the original Indo-European division of the world and not the division of the world into seven regions which he considers to be a Mesopotamian influence as Kirfel (1967: 28 ff.) has noted. By taking the Gāthic evidence into consideration we must conclude that if the Mesopotamia influence existed, it must have taken place in the second millennium BCE, where by the time of Zoroaster it would have become well known and influenced Persian belief. It is possible that at the time of Zoroaster (c. 1000 BCE), Mesopotamian ideas would have entered Central Asia (if this was the place where Zoroaster lived) and influenced Zoroastrian theology, but it would be very difficult to give evidence for the amount of contact. Thus, based on the Indic and Iranian evidence I am inclined to support this division (seven parts) as Indo-Iranian; see also Schwartz 1985: 643. Sh. Shahbazi (1994: 86), who has studied the sacred numbers in the Indo-Iranian and particularly Zoroastrian tradition, supplies the following numerals: 3 and 7.

direction, the climes of Fradadafš and Widadafš, two parts are in the Northwestern direction, the climes of Wōrūbaršt and Wōrūjaršt, two parts in between Xwanirah.

We should remember that the focus is the central clime, (Avestan) *Xvaniraθa* / (Middle Persian) *Xwanirah*, and is the most important of the seven climes:

ud az ēn haft kišwar hamāg nekīh andar xwanirah wēš dād.

And from these seven climes, all the goodness was created more in Xwanirah.

The reason *Xwanirah* is the most important clime is because all that is important to the Zoroastrian religion and sacred history of the Persians takes place in this clime:

čē kayān ud wīrān andar xwanirah dād ud dēn ī weh māzdēsnañ pad xwanirah dād ud pas ō abārīg kišwar burd sošyāns andar xwanirah zāyēd kē gannāg mēnōg a-gār kunēd ud rist-āxēz tan ī pasēn kunēd.

Because the Kayānids and the heroes were created in Xwanirah and the religion of the Mazda worshipping religion was created in Xwanirah, and then it was taken to other climes. Sošyāns will be born in Xwanirah, who will make the Evil Spirit powerless and bring about the resurrection and the final body.

This means that the ancient kings, the Kayānids, and all other important personages dwelled in this central clime. Also it was where the Mazda-worshipping religion (Zoroastrianism) came about and Sošyāns, the savior of the world, will appear in that clime. According to the *Avesta*, it is only *Xwanirah* that is inhabited by humanity and its living beings and its size is equal to the other six climes combined. Meanwhile, the other six climes are not only isolated from one another, but also from *Xwanirah*. Water (Lake Vouru.kaša) surrounds this central clime which distances it from the demons and noxious creatures that exist in the other six climes. Thus one can equate *Xwanirah* with the *oikoumenē*, while half of the world remains empty of humanity and civilization, occupied only by the demons that dwell there. This is the Avestan view of the world which gives us the most ancient image of the world according to the Persian belief.

The Sasanians, who established an empire firmly entrenched in Zoroastrian ideas, gave special credence to this seven-partite division of the world. As the result of the political and geographical realities of the Late Antique world, the Sasanians introduced changes to the Avestan world-view so that the mythical view fit the geopolitical realities. What changed with respect to the Avestan world-view was that now in the Zoroastrian Middle

Persian texts it was stated that people migrated to the other six climes which were previously uninhabited according to the *Avesta*. It was now stated that humans inhabited and resided in all the seven climes¹⁰. This change can be seen by looking at an important Zoroastrian encyclopedic text, the *Bundahišn*. The text states that it was believed that by riding the mythical bovine, *Srīšwag*, men were able to cross the water into the other six climes. From the fifteen couples who were born in the primordial times and who constituted the fifteen *sardag* “tribes” or “people”, nine were able to move to the other climes by riding *Srīšwag*. Six tribes remained in *Xwanirah*, where in fact seven are listed in the text. They are the Arabs, Persians, Māzandarānians, Turanians (Turks), Romans, Dahae, and the Indians (Bahār 1375: 179).

Another change as has been mentioned was the introduction of the concept of *Ērān* as the official name of the Sasanian empire (Gnoli 1989: 175). According to the Avestan world-view *Airyānəm Vaējō*, (Middle Persian) *Ērān-wēž* was located in Eastern Persia/Central Asia, by the river *Vaḡhvī Dāitiyā*, (Middle Persian) *Weh Dāitiya* (Oxus River) (Humbach 1991: 33). Thus, *Ērān* was part of the *Xwanirah* but in time it began to enlarge. This change was brought about by imperial ideology of the Sasanian kings who saw *Ērān* as a territory where the Persians lived. This was not the Avestan view but was where the Persians were living and ruling over since the Achaemenid period. This change is evident by looking at the boundary of *Ērān* as established by Šābuhr I (240-270 CE) in his inscription at Ka’be-ye Zardošt (ŠKZ):

Ērānšahr xwadāw ahēm ud dārām šahr: Pārs, Pahlaw, Xūzestān, Mēšān, Asōrestān, Nōdšīragān, Arabestān, Ādūrbādagān, Armen, Wiruzān, Segān, Alān, Balāsagān yad frāxš ō kōf ud Alānān bar, ud hamāg Padišxwar kōf, Mād, Wurgān, Marg, Harēw, ud hamāg Abaršahr, Kermān, Sagastān, Tūrān, Makrān, Pāradān, Hindestān, Kūšānšahr yad frāxš ō Paškabūr, ud yad ō Kāš, Sugd, Čāčestān marz, ud az hō āraq zrēh Mazūn šahr.

I am the ruler of *Ērān-ahr* and hold these *šahrs*: Persia, Parthia, Xuzistān, Mēšān, Assyria, Adiabene, Arabia, Āzerbāijān, Armenia, Geogris, Segan, Albania, Balaskan, up to the Caucasus mountains and the Gates of Albania, and all of the mountain chain of Pareswar, Media, Gurgan, Merv, Herāt and all of Abaršahr, Kermān, Sistan, Tūrān, Makrān, Paradene, India, Kušānšahr up to Peshawar and up to Kašgar, Sogdiana and to the mountains of Taškent, and on the other side of the sea, Oman. (Back 1978: 285-88; Huyse 1999: 22-23; Frye 1983: 371, appendix 4).

¹⁰ Bahār 1369: chap. IX, 71. A. Taffazolī (1364: 15.10) states that in the six tracts people drink milk as a primary source of nourishment.

This geographical boundary of *Ērān* is an imperial one reflecting the territory of the Sasanians in the third century CE. At this time we are given detailed information on which territory is considered *Ērān* and *an-Ērān* which is clearly reflected in the inscription of the famous Zoroastrian priest, Kerdīr. In his inscription, Kerdīr gives the following provinces as being the territory of *Ērān*:

*pārs ud pārt ud xūzestān ud āsūrestān ud mēšān
ud nōdšīrgān ud ādūrbādagān ud spahān ud rāy ud kermān
ud sagastān ud gūrgān tā frāz ō pešwar.*

Persis, Parthia, Xūzestān, Babylonia, Mesene,
Adiabene, Atropatene, Isfahān, Rāy, Kermān,
Sagastān, Gurgān up to Pešāwar. (Gignoux 1991: 71; Back 1978: 421-22).

Thus in the third century CE a Zoroastrian priest demonstrates that the concept of *Ērān/Ērānšahr* is tied to the Zoroastrian religion and for him it is distinguishable as to what lands are part of *Ērān* and *an-Ērān*. This means that there was a set territorial boundary which Zoroastrianism saw as its own. By comparing the ethnic and imperial boundaries we can see the empire of the Sasanians which the kings saw as their own under the titlature of *šāhān šāh ērān ud anērān* “King of Kings of *Ērān* and *non-Ērān*” was much larger.

During the late Sasanian period (6th-7th CE), however, another view is present which is different from the view of not only the *Avesta*, but also of the Middle Persian text, the *Bundahišn*, and the third century inscriptions. *Ērān*, or the area inhabited by the Iranians, was identified with the whole of *Xwanirah* which was the central clime where humanity originally existed. This may be because the authors had the inhabitants of *Xwanirah* pushed onto the other climes which had been uninhabited in the *Avesta*. This innovation should not solely be placed on the Zoroastrian priests, and we should keep in mind that the imperial propaganda (no doubt supported by the Zoroastrian priests) was also led by the monarchy. The tribes/people who were considered to be living in the *Xwanirah* according to the *Bundahišn* were now to be placed in each of the six climes, omitting the Mazandarānians and the Dahae and adding the people of Egypt and Syria as the sixth clime. This of course now looked like the list of the people the Sasanians knew and with whom they were in contact, but now they were placed and fitted in the Avestan seven-partite division of the world.

At this time *Ērān*, which was also to be known as *Ērānšahr* “Domain of the Iranians”, was to gain an amazing boundary which was neither in synchronization with the *Avesta* nor with the political realities of the Sasanian period. This fact is evident by looking at the only substantial

geographical work in the Middle Persian language, the *Šahrestānīhā ī Ērānšahr* “The Provincial Capitals of *Ērānšahr*” (Daryaee 2002). This book supplies a curious view of the Persian image of the world where *Ērān* is allotted an amazing boundary and where in fact *Ērān/Ērānšahr* is equated with the whole of *Xwanirah*. It is interesting that the cities mentioned in this text were not all the regions where the Iranians held sway and does not conform to the administrative setup of the Sasanian Empire (Gyselen 1988: 206).

The *Šahrestānīhā ī Ērānšahr* divides the Sasanian Empire into four *kusts* or regions, these being *kust ī xwarāsān* “Northeast region”; *kust ī xwarbarān* “Southwest region”; *kust ī nēmrōz* “Southeast region”; and *kust ī ādūrbādagān* “Northwest region”¹¹. It is interesting that for the Southwestern region the text mentions such territories as *frīgā* “Africa”, and such cities as *mekkā* “Mecca” and *madīnag* “Medina” in Arabia. The question is how did the Sasanians see these territories as part of *Ērān/Ērānšahr*? Simply put, this image of the world begins with the administrative reforms of Kawād I and his son Xusrō I in the sixth century CE, but it is crystallized during the reign of Xusrō II (590-628 CE) whose imperial ambitions took Persian armies to Africa and the walls of Constantinople.

As for Arabia, while Oman had been under Persian control on and off from the third century CE, Yemen had been taken by the Persian forces during the time of Xusrō I in 575 CE. Arabic sources also attest to the fact that Persians had been in Mecca in the sixth century CE, and probably were also involved in Medina, the two major cities of Eastern Arabia which the *Šahrestānīhā ī Ērānšahr* considers as part of *Ērān/Ērānšahr* (Kister 1968: 145-46). As for Africa it is well known that Xusrō II’s forces invaded and occupied Egypt from 619 to 628 CE. There are also reports that the Persian forces, while occupying Egypt, made incursions Westward into Libya and Southward into Ethiopia (Altheim-Stiehl 1992: 92). This far out venture of Xusrō II’s forces, while short-lived, remained in Persian memory in a variety of sources. Tabarī reports that Xusrō’s riders had reached as far as Africa (Arabic *Ifrīqiyah*; Tabarī 1999: 376), which is probably referring to North Africa. Another mention of Persian involvement in Ethiopia is contained in the Medieval Persian epic, the *Kūšnāme* “the Book of Kūš” (ed. by Matīnī). In this text the hero, who was born from the union of a Persian

¹¹ The manner in which the boundaries or regions of *Ērān* is given is in diagonal order which is reminiscent of Darius’ gold and silver tablets at Persepolis. The boundaries or limits of the Achaemenid empire is given as “from the land of the Sakas to Ethiopia and from India to Sardis” and may be part of a long oral tradition which lasts from the Achaemenid period to the late Sasanian period, see Daryaee 2001. For the similarity between the Achaemenid and Sasanian inscriptions see Skjervø 1985; Huyse 1990.

hero and an African woman, is sent on behalf of the Iranians to conquer the Ethiopians which he does, but changes sides and another battle is fought in the kingdom of Kūš.

I believe this medieval Persian epic has encapsulated the late Sasanian encounter between the Persians and Ethiopians; however, it is short-lived and embellished in the manner in which epic texts are usually composed. One last piece of evidence comes from the Georgian chronicle, *The History of King Vaxt'ang Grogali* which is dated to the eighth/ninth century CE. The chronicle has a section in which the hero of the text, *Vaxt'ang* with the Persian king, goes to the land of *Abašet'i*. The location of this region is given as the dwelling of the following people: “a land which was surrounded by water and reeds, in which neither ships nor even quadrupeds could move. It is on the borders of Persia”¹². This evidence suggests not only a fascination with Ethiopia, but also some kind of historical connection between the two peoples which is reminiscent of Herodotus's account of Cambyses's plan of the invasion of Ethiopia.

If these historical accounts are the point of reference for the geographical outlook of the *Šahrestānīhā ī Ērānšahr*, we can state that during the late Sasanian period an image of the world had developed among the Persians which was based on the imperialistic policies of the sixth and early seventh centuries CE. This was the time in which the empire had become reinvigorated and reached its largest limits and it also exerted influence far beyond its political borders. Now *Ērān/Ērānšahr* had expanded and reflected a new Sasanian imperial image of the world. When Xusrō II was given the title of *haft kišwar xwadāy* “Lord of the seven climes” (Monchi-Zadeh 1982: 63), this concept of the world harkened to the Avestan ideas as reflected in *Kayān* or *Zamyād Yašt* where the Kayānid kings had not only been known as being endowed with the (Avestan) *kauuaēm x^varəno* “Kavīyan Glory”¹³, but also known as *yat xšaiiata paiti būmīm haptaiθiiqm* “who ruled over the seven climes of earth”. What had changed, however, was that while holding to this title, non-Iranians had been pushed onto the other six climes and *Xwanirah* had been equated with *Ērān/Ērānšahr*¹⁴.

Going back to ethnicity and its connection to boundary, it is also evident that non-Zoroastrian Persians identified with *Ērānšahr*. A good example of

¹² Thomson 1996: 210-11. The Armenian version has “Habašet’, to the land of the K’uš”. It is interesting that the Armenian version of the texts states that from the capture and deportation of one thousand people of K’uš the nation of the Kušāns came about (p. 212).

¹³ For the use of the concept of *xwarrah* “glory” on the coins of the late Sasanian rulers see Daryaei 1998.

¹⁴ One can also suspect that *X^vaniraθa* is the land of settled dwelling and equated with the civilized clime, then *Ērān* is the only civilized region.

such a view can be found from an inscription on a coffin at Constantinople. The coffin belongs to a Christian Persian named Xordād, the son of Hormizd-Āfrīd, who had traveled to Byzantium probably in the ninth century CE (de Blois 1990), when the Arab Muslims had put an end to the Sasanians, installing Caliphate rule. The homeland of Hormizd-Āfrīd was now part of the eastern possession of the Muslim world (*dar al-Islam*). The home and homeland of Hormizd-Āfrīd, according to the inscription, is mentioned in the following manner:

az mān ī ērānšahr, az rōstā (ī) čālagān, az deh (ī) xīšt.

From the dwelling of *Ērānšahr*, from the district of Čālagān, from the village of Xīšt.

Thus, part of this inscription suggests that while the Sasanian Empire is no more, *Ērānšahr* had also lost its religious component for the non-Zoroastrians. *Ērānšahr* was identified by a Christian Persian as its territorial homeland. I suggest this had already begun in the fifth century CE, when the Christian Persian church had been recognized. Then it appears that regardless of religion, the Persians had constructed a set boundary in their minds as to the territorial extent of *Ērānšahr*. Now this extent would be interestingly different for the different religious communities. The territory which Hormizd-Āfrīd considers *Ērānšahr* may be the imperial boundary of Oxus to the Euphrates from the third to the seventh centuries. But for Zoroastrian priests of the early Sasanian period, it was the lands which Kerdīr had enumerated in the third century. The imperial boundary, however, had grown much larger, and we can see that it passed to the Muslim Persians as well.

As for the expanse of *Ērānšahr* in the late Sasanian period, according to the *Šahrestānīhā ī Ērānšahr*, it is from Central Asia to Africa. This view was to become part of the Persian literary tradition, where in the *Preface to the Šāhnāme of Abū Mansūrī* the limits of *Ērānšahr* is given as following:

Ērānšahr is from the Amū Daryā (Oxus) river to Mīsr (Nile) river and these other regions are around it, and from these seven regions, *Ērānšahr* is more magnanimous in every part.¹⁵

Thus the mythical division of the world into seven climes was finally fitted into a political reality as represented in the maps of the early Islamic period as supplied by Bērūnī, which matches that of the description by the *Preface to the Šāhnāme of Abū Mansūrī*.

¹⁵ Qazvīnī 1363: 49; I think Monchi-Zadeh, in editing the text, forces the issue by attempting to correct the text based on the traditional boundaries of the Sasanian empire, where he replaced the Nile river with that of *forāt* “Euphrates” (Monchi-Zadeh 1975: 8).

What the Persian Muslim scholar, Bērūnī states is the image of the world based on the Persian image of the world (Bērūnī 1367: 196). This inverted map of the world shows some modification from the Avestan division in that rather than having one clime to the East and the other on the Western side and two to the North and South, two are placed in the East and two towards the Western direction and one to the North and one to the South. We can see that *Ērān/Ērānšahr* is from Egypt to the dwelling of Turks (Central Asia), similar to the description of the *Preface to the Šāhnāme of Abū Mansūrī* and to the *Šahrestānīhā ī Ērānšahr*. The map certainly is fallacious in its accurate description of the borders of *Ērānšahr*, but the scribe had to abide by the ancient Persian image of the world, where *Ērānšahr* had to remain at the center while every other land encircled it. Even in the more accurate drawing of the maps of the known world to the Persian Muslims, still *Ērānšahr* (in this map called *šahrhā-ye bārs* “cities of Persia”) occupied the central location.

Conclusion

While the concept of *Ērānšahr* and being *ēr* had its roots in Zoroastrianism, already in the third century CE the imperial and religious views began to diverge. In the Sasanian period, to be an *ēr* did not mean to be solely a Zoroastrian Persian, as demonstrated from the Christian Middle Persian inscription. This was certainly agreeable to the Sasanian monarchs whose imperial ambitions were restricted by Zoroastrian religious exclusions. The Manichaeans, however, did not take to the idea of *ēr*. It may be that since the Christian and Jewish communities were recognized by the king and the state, they did identify with *Ērānšahr*. The Jews had been recognized as a community from the third, and the Christians from the fifth century CE. The Manichaeans on the other hand, were persecuted and driven out of the empire. This may be the reason for which the Manichaeans along with the Arabs, the Chinese and the Romans called the Sasanian territory “Fars, Persis, or Persia” (Gnoli 1989: 152, 156), and not *Ērānšahr*. Since they could not be part of *Ērānšahr*, they did not accept such a conception of boundary constructed by the Sasanians. This means that by Late Antiquity different religious communities had different notions of ethnicity in relation to *ēr* and the boundary of *Ērānšahr*. While the religious communities would have considered themselves separate from others, especially in the case of the Jews, it was the Sasanian state that saw those who were willing to serve the family of Sāsān and sustain the empire as citizens and as *Ērānagān* and *mard / zan ī šahr*. Those who did not or were not accepted by the state, the Manichaeans being the notable example, were

not only persecuted and driven out of the empire, but they were also not considered to be citizens. In turn, they would neither consider themselves as the citizens of *Ērānšahr*, nor recognize the empire of *Ērānšahr*.

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