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The Study of Ancient Iran in the Twentieth Century

The following article discusses the development of ancient Iranian studies, namely the important philological, archaeological, religious, and historical discoveries in the twentieth century and how they have changed our views of ancient Iran and its impact on modern Iranian identity. The essay also previews the use and abuse of ancient Iranian studies by the state and their focus on the newly discovered Achaemenid Empire at the cost of Arsacid and Sasanian dynasties.

The study of Ancient Iran began in earnest in Europe in the latter half of the nineteenth century. From German philologists working on the Avesta, to British officers turned scholar-gentlemen working on the Old Persian inscriptions, to the French excavating in Susa, the world of ancient Iran was being rediscovered without much knowledge of the Iranians. These discoveries and endeavors came about at a time in Iran's history when the Qajars, and more importantly the Pahlavis, began not only to take note of their ancient past, but also to use it as part of state building and to solidify the nation. That is, one can see an interesting interplay between academic and scholarly work and the governmental agenda aiming at the creation of a new image of the nation-state of Iran. In this essay, I shall touch upon the most important discoveries and works that have taken place in the realm of ancient Iranian studies in the past century. For the sake of organization and clarification, the paper will be divided into four categories: Iranian philology and religion; archaeology and material culture; religion; and history.

Iranian Philology and Religion

European scholars did not need to be in Iran to deal with the language and literary remains of the ancient Iranian world. In fact, the contact between scholars and the textual and literary evidence of ancient Iran first took place in India. It was the Parsi community which helped in this endeavor, where Zoroastrian

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manuscripts were given or sold to scholars and adventurers to be taken back to the universities, libraries, and museums in Europe. While the foundations of the study of Zoroastrian and other ancient Iranian writing had been laid out by such people as E.W. West, J. Darmesteter, and K.F. Geldner, it was in the twentieth century that major discoveries and developments took place.¹ In the first decade of the twentieth century, the great work of Ch. Bartholomae came to light in the form of one of the best dictionaries ever produced, certainly for Iranian languages. His *Altiranisches Wörterbuch*, which concentrated on Avestan and Old Persian language, is for any time and place, an amazing work.² With Geldner's critical edition of the *Avesta* and Bartholomae's work, along with his further commentaries on Old Iranian vocabulary, a clear path was set for an understanding of Zoroastrian scripture.³ The importance of Geldner's and Bartholomae's works became manifest with the first reliable translation of the Gāthās of Zarathushtra by Bartholomae himself.⁴ Based on these publications, new translations of the other important parts of the *Avesta* were made possible. This included the translations of the Yašt by F. Wolff and H. Lommel, as well as, the Gāthās by Lommel, J. Duchesne-Guillemin, and S. Insler.⁵

However, in the second half of the twentieth century a new approach to the *Avesta*, and especially the Gāthās, took place which has come to fruition in the twenty-first century. It was Karl Hoffmann whose comparative and rigorous approach to the Avestan material brought a rereading of these sacred texts. His most ardent follower, Helmut Humbach produced a new translation of the Gāthās in 1959.⁶ With attention to the grammar and the study of the hymns in comparison to the Vedic material, the structure and language became the focus rather than the tradition and views about the prophet and his poetry. This in turn gave way to the next generation of Iranian philologists who completely changed our understanding of Zoroastrianism and the meaning of the *Avesta*. At the forefront of this new group of philologists stand Jean Kellens, Eric Pirart, followed by Prods Oktor Skjærvø. Kellens and Pirart's translation of the Gāthās and the old Avestan texts in the 1980s signaled a new phase in the field of Avestan and Zoroastrian studies.⁷ In their three-volume

¹Pahlavi or Middle Persian texts translated by E.W. West are in the series, F.M. Müller, ed. *Sacred Books of the East*, Vols. 5, 18, 24, 37, 47; J. Darmesteter, *The Zend-Avesta, Sacred Books of the East*, Vols. 4, 23, 31 (New York, 1900); K.F. Geldner, *Avesta. The Sacred Books of the Parsis* (Stuttgart, 1889–1896).

²Ch. Bartholomae, *Altiranisches Wörterbuch* (Strassburg, 1904).

³Ch. Bartholomae, *Zum Altiranischen Wörterbuch. Nacharbeiten und Vorarbeiten* (Strassburg, 1906).

⁴Ch. Bartholomae, *Die Gathas des Avesta, Zarathushtra's Verspredigten* (Strassburg, 1905).

⁵F. Wolff, *Avesta: Die heiligen Bücher der Parsen übersetzt auf der Grundlage von Chr. Bartholomae's Altiranischem Wörterbuch* (Strassburg, 1910); H. Lommel, *Die Yašt's des Avesta* (Göttingen, 1927); H. Lommel, *Die Gathas des Zarathustra* (Basel, 1971); J. Duchesne-Guillemin, *The Hymns of Zarathustra* (Boston, 1963); J. Duchesne-Guillemin, *The Hymns of Zarathustra* (Boston, 1963); S. Insler, *The Gāthās of Zarathustra* (Tehran-Liège, 1975).

⁶H. Humbach, *Die Gathas des Zarathustra*, 2 vols (Heidelberg, 1959).

⁷J. Kellens and E. Pirart, *Les textes vieil-avestiques* (Wiesbaden, 1988–1990).

work, Kellens and Pirart put forth many new ideas which are outside the purview of this article, but to summarize, they include the following points. These liturgical poems were not composed by a man named Zarathushtra, but rather by a group of poets. The poems themselves are very much in line with the Vedic traditions and are ritual texts which have very little ethical or moral sense to them as it was once thought. Thus, in a way these scholars attempted to emancipate the text from the cultural and historical biases which had been accumulated in the later Zoroastrian tradition, giving us the original meaning and motive of these texts. Kellens and Pirart and Skjærvø, in many articles, mainly in *Journal Asiatique* and others, have tackled in the same manner the Younger Avestan material.⁸

In the field of Old Persian, the work of the Indo-Europeanist, Ronald G. Kent is the best and most widely used work on the study of Achaemenid inscriptions.⁹ By the end of the century Pierre Lecoq's book on the Old Persian inscriptions provided a translation, but also a study in terms of the socio-cultural tradition of the Achaemenid Empire.¹⁰ But it has been Rüdiger Schmitt who has spent much of his career in bringing about a thorough study of Old Persian language and inscriptions. His important article on the state of Old Persian studies in the twentieth century set the groundwork for his endeavor in the field for the past three decades.¹¹ In 1991, the longest Old Persian inscription, that of Darius's *Behistun inscription*, was translated with notes, and in 2000 the rest of Old Persian inscriptions were published by him.¹²

In the field of Middle Iranian studies, the discoveries of documents in Turfan changed everything. The pioneer and master in this field was Walter B. Henning, who first was exposed to these texts by his teacher, Friedrich Carl Andreas. Subsequently, Henning began the publication and translation of new Sogdian, Parthian, Khwarazmian, and Middle Persian texts. His meticulous approach and keen eye for the details made Henning renowned in the field of Iranian Studies in the twentieth century. His Nachlass in two volumes in the *Acta Iranica* series is a testament to his learning.¹³ D.N. MacKenzie, E. Yarshater, M. Boyce, G. Azarpay, and M. Schwartz are some of his students who continued in the field of Iranian Studies and who have made important contributions to the field of Middle Iranian language, Iranian dialects, Zoroastrianism, the history of Iranian art, and Iranian philology. Henning and his professor's early study and later contribution to the deciphering of Manichaean texts in Sogdian,

⁸For a review of the recent studies see the important work of P.O. Skjærvø, "The State of Old Avestan Scholarship," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 117, no. 1 (1997): 103–114.

⁹R.G. Kent, *Old Persian Grammar, Texts, Lexicon* (Connecticut, 1950).

¹⁰P. Lecoq, *Les inscriptions de la Perse achéménide* (Paris, 1997).

¹¹R. Schmitt, "Altpersisch-Forschung in de Siebzigerjahren," *Kratylos* 25 (1980): 1–66.

¹²R. Schmitt, *The Bisitun Inscriptions of Darius the Great*, *Corpus Inscriptionum Iranicarum I, I, Texts I* (London, 1991); *The Old Persian Inscriptions of Naqsb-i Rostam and Persepolis*, *Corpus Inscriptionum Iranicarum I, Texts II* (London, 2000).

¹³W.B. Henning, *Selected Papers*, *Acta Iranica*, vols. 5 & 6 (Tehran-Liege, 1977).

Parthian, and Middle Persian gave impetus to M. Boyce's early philological work on Manichaean hymns in Parthian, and to her workbook on Manichaean Middle Persian and Parthian language and literature.¹⁴ Boyce's other major contribution was in the field of Zoroastrian studies, which will be dealt with in a section below.

A student of Henning, D.N. MacKenzie excelled in the field of Middle Iranian philology, working on Buddhist Sogdian texts, Kurdish dialectology, the all important Manichaean Middle Persian text, the *Šāburagān*, and his Pahlavi dictionary.¹⁵ Werner Sundermann has also significantly contributed to the field of Manichaean studies along with N. Sims-Williams.¹⁶ Khotanese, the language of the Iranian Sakas, whose base was in Khotan (Chinese Turkestan), is another Middle Iranian language which has been the purview of a few scholars, most notably Sten Konow and H.W. Bailey in the first half of the twentieth century and then R.E. Emmerick.¹⁷ The new Bactrian documents have also opened a new field of Iranian philology, thanks to the work of N. Sims-Williams. Lastly we should not forget the important *Sogdian Dictionary* of B.-Z. Gharib, whose work will remain indispensable.¹⁸ Her students, including Z. Zarshenas, have trained many students in Iran in the field of Middle Iranian.

Archaeology and Material Culture

Interest in Iran and its ancient civilization began in the nineteenth century.¹⁹ It was in the 1920s and the 1930s that the great German archaeologist, philologist,

¹⁴F.C. Andreas and W. Henning, "Mitteliranische Manichaica aus Chinesisch-Turkestan II" SPAW (1933): 294–363 and "Mitteliranische Manichaica aus Chinesisch-Turkestan III" SPAW (1934): 848–912; M. Boyce, *The Manichaean Hymn-Cycles in Parthian* (London, 1954); M. Boyce, "A Reader in Manichaean Middle Persian and Parthian," *Acta Iranica*, vol. 9 (Tehran-Liege, 1975) and "A word-list of Manichaean Middle Persian and Parthian," *Acta Iranica*, vol. 9a (Tehran-Liege, 1977).

¹⁵D.N. MacKenzie, *The Buddhist Sogdian Texts of the British Library*, *Acta Iranica* (Tehran-Liege, 1976), D.N. MacKenzie, *Kurdish Dialect Studies I & II* (London, 1961, 1962); D.N. MacKenzie, *A Concise Pahlavi Dictionary* (London, 2000).

¹⁶W. Sundermann, *Mittelpersische und parthische kosmogonische und Parabeltexte der Manichäer. Mit einigen Bemerkungen zu Motiven der Parabeltexte von Fr. Geissler*, *Berliner Turfantexte*, vol. 4 (Berlin, 1973); W. Sundermann, "Ein weiteres Fragment aus Manis Gigantenbuch," *Orientalia J. Duchesne-Guillemin emerito oblata*, *Acta Iranica*, 23 (Leiden, 1984): 491–505; W. Sundermann, *Der Sermon vom Licht-Nous. Eine Lehrschrift des östlichen Manichäismus*, *Berliner Turfantexte*, vol. 17 (Berlin, 1992); W. Sundermann, *Mitteliranische manichäische Texte kirchengeschichtlichen Inhalts mit einem Appendix von N. Sims-Williams*, *Berliner Turfantexte*, vol. 11 (Berlin, 1981); N. Sims-Williams, *The Christian Sogdian manuscript C2*, *Berliner Turfantexte*, vol. 12 (Berlin, 1985).

¹⁷Sten Konow, "The Arapacana Alphabet and the Sakas," *Acta Orientalia* 12 (1934): 13–24; *Codices khotanenses* (Copenhagen, 1938); *Khotanese Texts* (Cambridge, 1945); *Khotanese Buddhist Texts* (London, 1951); *Dictionary of Khotan Saka* (Cambridge, 1979); *The Culture of the Sakas in Ancient Iranian Khotan* (New York, 1982); R.E. Emmerick, *Saka Grammatical Studies* (Oxford, 1968); *The Book of Zambasta: A Khotanese Poem on Buddhism* (Oxford, 1968).

¹⁸B. Gharib, *Sogdian Dictionary* (Tehran, 1994).

¹⁹For a study of the history of archaeology in Iran, see Ali Mousavi and Nader Nasiri-Moghaddam, "Les Hauts et les Bas de l'Archéologie en Iran," *La Pensée de Midi* 27 (2009): 137–143.

and historian, E. Herzfeld, became interested in the province of Fārs. His initial work had been on Pasargadae, but he quickly turned his attention to Persepolis with spectacular results.²⁰ However, between 1934 and 1939, it was E. Schmidt who began his monumental work at Persepolis which resulted in major publications by the same name.²¹ By the 1940s, the Achaemenids and Persepolis became the main cultural symbols of Iran, mainly promoted by the Pahlavi dynasty. This “Achaemenidization” of ancient Iranian history was furthered by the work at the stronghold of Cyrus the Great at Pasargadae.²² Again, it was E. Herzfeld whose early work had been on the Pasargadae, but then Ali Sami followed by David Stronach made the monument known to the Iranians and the world at large.²³ These studies in 1971, especially that of Ali Sami, culminated in calling the 2,500th anniversary of Iranian monarchy the “year of Cyrus the Great” and calling his cylinder text “the first proclamation of human rights in history.” In Shiraz a great conference was convened which culminated in the publication of the proceedings under the title of *Commémoration Cyrus*, where among the presenters were such varied personages as Arnold J. Toynbee and Israeli prime minister David Ben-Gurion.²⁴ The Pahlavi dynasty’s attempt at connecting its rule to that of the Achaemenids and to Pasargadae would have repercussions some eight years later when there was an attempt at bulldozing the tomb of Cyrus the Great by the new revolutionary government of Iran.²⁵

In terms of pre-Achaemenid work, one must mention de Morgan’s work at Susa in the beginning of the century, R. Ghirshman’s excavations at Tepe Sialk near Kashan in the 1930s, Ecbatana excavations in the 1950s by R.H. Dyson, Anshan excavations in the early 1970s by W. M. Sumner, and Tepe Nush-i Jan excavations between 1967 and 1977 by D. Stronach.²⁶ In the early

²⁰E. Herzfeld, *Archaeological History of Iran. The Schweich Lectures of the British Academy 1934* (London, 1935). See also, A. Mousavi, “Ernst Herzfeld, Politics, and Antiquities Legislation in Iran,” *Ernst Herzfeld and the Development of Near Eastern Studies, 1900-1950* (Boston, 2004): 445–475.

²¹E. Schmidt, *Persepolis I: Structures, Reliefs, Inscriptions* (Chicago, 1953); *Persepolis II: Contents of the Treasury and Other Discoveries* (Chicago, 1957); *Persepolis III: The Royal Tombs and Other Monuments* (Chicago, 1970); *The Treasury of Persepolis and Other Discoveries in the Homeland of the Achaemenians*, Oriental Institute 21 (Chicago, 1939).

²²For the importance of *Cyrus the Great for the Pahlavi Dynasty*, see A. Marashi, *Nationalizing Iran: Culture, Power & the State, 1870–1940* (Washington, 2008): 3–5.

²³E. Herzfeld, “Pasargadae: Untersuchungen zur persischen Archäologie,” *Klio* 8 (1908) 1:68; A. Sami, *Pasargadae: The Oldest Imperial Capital of Iran* (Shiraz, 1956); D. Stronach, *Pasargadae: A Report on the Excavations Conducted by the British Institute of Persian Studies from 1961 to 1963* (Oxford, 1978).

²⁴*Commémoration Cyrus: Hommage Universel*, Acta Iranica, 3 vols. (Tehran-Liege, 1974).

²⁵For the Pahlavi use of ancient Iran see, K. Abdi, “Nationalism, Politics, and the Development of Archaeology in Iran,” *American Journal of Archaeology* 105, no. 1 (2001): 51–76.

²⁶J. de Morgan, “Ruines de Sus,” *M.D.P. I* (Paris, 1900): 50–54 and J. de Morgan, *La Délégation en Perse du Ministère de l’instruction publique 1897 à 1902* (Paris, 1902); J. de Morgan, “Observations sur les couches profondes de l’Acropole de Suse,” *M.D.P. XIII* (Paris, 1912): 1–25; R. Ghirshman, *Fouilles de Sialk, près de Kashan*, 1933, 1934, 1937 (Paris, 1938); R. H. Dyson, Jr., “Iran, 1956,” *University Museum Bulletin* 21, no. 1 (Philadelphia, 1957): 27–39; W.M. Sumner, “Excavations at Tall-i

1960s E. Negahban's excavations in northern Iran at the site of Marlik brought to light some amazing gold objects. Along the Gohar Rud thousands of objects, several hundred in gold, were discovered.²⁷ After the 1979 revolution there was a halt in excavations, and foreign archaeologists were banned from digging in Iran. However, in the mid 1980s work began again, this time with Iranians leading the work and at times being joined by British, French, Italian, Japanese, and American archaeologists. Among some of the most spectacular Sasanian finds and discoveries is the site of Bandiyan at Darregez in northeastern Khurasan excavated by Mehdi Rahbar, and M. Azarnoush's discovery of the Sasanian palace complex at Hajjiabad in southern Iran.²⁸

In the field of material culture, more specifically the study of numismatics, seals, and bullae, there has been tremendous work. Numismatics is a field that is dominated not only by scholars, but also by collectors, antiquarians, and enthusiasts. There had been a lot of work done on the numismatic history of ancient Iran, such as studies by J. de Morgan, but most give attention to specific cities, locations, or problems. There has been less attention to the field of Achaemenid numismatics. E. Herzfeld, S.P. Noe, and more recently D. Stronach and A. Zournatzi have studied Achaemenid coinage. Three scholars in the twentieth century have given us works which classify and provide a handbook for the Arsacid/Parthian and the Sasanian period. D. Sellwood in 1971 provided the first complete manual of Arsacid/Parthian coinage.²⁹ For Sasanian numismatics the Parsi scholar F.D.J. Paruck, in the first half of the twentieth century, provided a handbook for Sasanian coinage.³⁰ D. Sellwood in a similar fashion, with beautiful sketches, provided an updated work of Paruck.³¹ However, it is R. Göbl who has given us a systematic classification of the Sasanian coinage based on scientific manner.³² If one wants to have an understanding of the

Malyan, 1971–72," *Iran* 12 (1974): 155–180; D. Stronach, "Tepe Nush-I Jan: A Mound in Media," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 27, no. 3 (1968): 177–186.

²⁷E. Negahban, *Metal vessels from Marlik*, (Munich, 1983); E. Negahban, *Excavations at Haft Tepe, Iran* (Philadelphia, 1991); E. Negahban, *Weapons from Marlik* (Berlin, 1995); E. Negahban, *Marlik: The Complete Excavation Report*, University Museum Monograph 87 (Pennsylvania, 1995).

²⁸For a comprehensive survey of fieldwork in Iran in the past three decades see A. Mousavi, "A Survey of the Archaeology of the Sasanian Period During the Past Three Decades," *e-Sasanika* 1(2008) (<http://www.sasanika.com>); M. Azarnoush, *The Sasanian Manor house at Hajjiabad, Iran* (Florence, 1994).

²⁹E. Herzfeld, "Notes on the Achaemenid Coinage and Some Sasanian Mint-Names," *Transactions of the International Numismatic Congress* (London, 1938); A. Zournatzi, "The Processing of Gold and Silver Tax In the Achaemenid Empire: Herodotus 3.96.2 and the Archaeological Realities," *Studia Iranica* 29 (2000); D. Stronach, "Early Achaemenid Coinage: Perspectives From The Homeland," *Iranica Antiqua* 24 (Gent, 1989); S. P. Noe, "Two Hoards of Persian Sigloi," *American Numismatic Society NNM No. 136* (New York, 1956); David Sellwood, *An Introduction to the Coinage of Parthia*, 1971 (London, 1980); D. Stronach, "Early Achaemenid Coinage: Perspectives From The Homeland," *Iranica Antiqua* 24 (Gent, 1989).

³⁰F.D.J. Paruck, *Sasanian Coins* (Bombay, 1924).

³¹D. Sellwood, P. Whitting and R. Williams, *An Introduction to Sasanian Coins* (London, 1985).

³²Robert Göbl, *Sasanian Numismatics* (Braunschweig, 1971).

coinage types, legends, and onomastics for not only the Achaemenids, Arsacids, and Sasanians, but also for the minor dynasties on the Iranian Plateau, one can now consult the monumental work of M. Alram.³³

Seals and their impressions, commonly known as bullae, were again first studied in a systematic fashion by the great Austrian scholar R. Göbl.³⁴ But it was in Paris where Ph. Gignoux and R. Gyselen not only elaborated on the work of their predecessors, but also created a corpus of work in the past two decades that has transformed Sasanian and ancient Iranian epigraphy.³⁵ In the 1980s, there was a collaboration between the two, but it has been R. Gyselen who has been more prolific in the study of seals and bullae with spectacular results.³⁶ Based on these works, we have a better understanding of the administrative structure of the Sasanian Empire, as well as of the officials and the different ranks that existed. The importance of these seals and bullae is that, while some of the offices are mentioned in the literary sources, the material culture provides corroboration, correction, and in many instances new information on offices and officials.

Religion

Some of the issues relating to Zoroastrianism were raised in the section “Iranian Philology and Religion.” For example, J. Kellens and his work along with E. Pirart were discussed, but the gravity of their conclusions mandates further attention. In the early twentieth century, with the development of Iranian philology and the discovery of texts, a better understanding of Zoroastrianism developed. M. Boyce was the chief proponent of studying Zoroastrianism from the perspective of an inner tradition, where later Pahlavi texts substantiated many of the older tradition. She was by far the most prolific and best known expert in the field of Zoroastrianism.³⁷ Her followers and pupils, such as J.R. Russell, studied the Zoroastrian tradition in Armenia, while others worked on India as well as Iran.³⁸

But Boyce held views very much in contrast to the philologists like Kellens, Pirart, and Skjærvø, who believed that one should not necessarily trust the

³³M. Alram, *Iranisches Personennamenbuch: Nomina Propria Iranica In Nummis* (Wien, 1986).

³⁴Robert Göbl, *Der Sasanidische Siegelkanon* (Braunschweig, 1971).

³⁵Among the many works of these scholars, one can point to P. Gignoux, “Les Quatre Inscriptions du Mage Kirdîr,” *Studia Iranica* cahier 9 (1991); R. Gyselen, “Nouveaux Matériaux Sigillographiques pour la Géographie Administrative de l’Empire Sassanide: sceaux administratifs de la collection Ahmad Saeedi,” *Studia Iranica*, cahier 24 (Paris, 2002); A. Saeedi, “Sasanian Seals and Sealings,” *Acta Iranica*, (2007); P. Gignoux, *Pad nam i yazdan: Etudes d’épigraphie, de numismatique et d’histoire de l’Iran ancien* (1979).

³⁶R. Gyselen, *La Géographie Administrative de L’Empire Sassanide - Les Témoignages Sigillographiques*, Res Orientales I (Paris, 1989); Ph. Gignoux, “Bullet et sceaux sassanides de diverse collections” *Cahiers de Studia Iranica* 4 (Paris, 1987); Ph. Gignoux, “Catalogue des sceaux, camées et bulles sassanides de la Bibliothèque Nationale et Musée du Louvre” (Paris, 1993).

³⁷M. Boyce, *A History of Zoroastrianism* (Leiden, 1989).

³⁸J.R. Russell, *Zoroastrianism in Armenia* (Cambridge, 1987).

Zoroastrian tradition, as it was constructed later, specifically in the Sasanian period, in reflecting on the past. Rather, a critical study of the Old Avestan texts without much regard for the inner tradition itself would result in a very different view of what Zoroastrianism was and what it meant in the beginning. Once our trio of philologists emancipated the “text” from the tradition, they were able to dismantle the “traditional” views championed by Boyce and company. The effect and resonance of the Kellens group can be gleaned from the copious and incisive study by M. Stausberg, who in many ways is now the leading scholar of Zoroastrianism.³⁹ Thus, while there were heated discussions in the early twentieth century about the Prophet Zarathushtra and his world-view and religion by such scholars as A.V. Williams Jackson, H. Lommel, E. Herzfeld, H.S. Nyberg, and W.B. Henning, in the second half of the twentieth century the debate continued, but those who saw the importance of the text over tradition won.⁴⁰ Thus, with M. Molé’s brilliant work on the Zoroastrian tradition and the questioning of traditional Zoroastrianism and the “mythical” standing of Zarathushtra within the tradition, Kellens and company opted for the non-existence of a Zarathushtra, or even the existence of Zarathushtras (plural), about which we have no real historical material to work with and with a world-view that has been misjudged and misunderstood since the time of Molé by European and American scholars.⁴¹ This questioning and “rescuing” Zarathushtra and Zoroastrianism from its own tradition has its beginning with Molé, and while he was able to open the Pandora’s Box, he himself fell victim to his professor, E. Benveniste’s disapproval.

This does not mean that there are no proponents of the historicity of Zarathushtra and the message of the Prophet, which was deciphered a century ago by European philologists. H.-P. Schmidt, S. Insler, and M. Schwartz have pushed to demonstrate that the Gāthās might be the work of one man and that person who has weaved these thoughts together is Zarathushtra. They have been critical of Kellens, Pirart, and Skjærvø and their views and not only through philological argumentation, but through the study of Indo-Iranian tradition—that is, the same tools that their opponents have used, have shown the opposite. Schmidt and Schwartz have tried to demonstrate that one can see the signature of Zarathushtra on his poems through the study of literary patterns, such as ring composition, anagrams, acoustics, acrostics, and other literary techniques. While Schmidt began this trend in the 1960s to the 1980s, it has now been Schwartz who has taken the initial studies of Schmidt further, applying these

³⁹M. Stausberg, *Die Religion Zarathustras. Geschichte – Gegenwart – Rituale*, 3 vols. (Stuttgart, 2004).

⁴⁰A.V. Williams Jackson, *Zoroaster* (New York, 1899); H. Lommel, *Die Religion Zarathustras* (Tübingen, 1930); E. Herzfeld, *Zoroaster and his world* (Princeton, 1947); H.S. Nyberg, *Die Religionen des alten Iran* (Leipzig, 1938); W.B. Henning, *Zoroaster, politician or witch-doctor?* (London, 1949).

⁴¹M. Molé, *Culte, mythe et cosmologie dans l’Iran ancien* (Paris, 1963); See Kellens’s discussion in his inaugural lectures, *Essays on Zarathustra and Zoroastrianism*, translated into English by Prods O. Skjærvø (Costa Mesa, 2000).

techniques to all of the Gāthās of Zarathushtra, to save the Prophet from becoming an ahistorical figure without a humanistic message.

History

In the twentieth century the history of ancient Iran/Persia has been the subject of intense study. Early on A.T. Olmstead's work on Achaemenid history, N.C. Debevoise on Arsacid history, and A. Christensen's history of Iran during the Sasanians were, and in many ways continue to be, important works.⁴² However, the discovery of the Persepolis fortification archive and the Aramaic ritual texts brought about a new understanding of Achaemenid Persian history. Also work on Egyptian, Elamite, and Babylonian documents has gradually given us a better view of events and the history of the Achaemenids, in some ways free from the Greek biases, or as a corrective to them. These advances brought about the important works of M.A. Dandamaev, another in collaboration with V.G. Lukonin, and a new stage of Achaemenid studies.⁴³ The Groningen publications on Achaemenid history began in 1987 under the auspices of H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg and continued after her premature death, where eleven of the thirteen volumes were published before the twenty-first century. The volumes dealt with such topics as evaluation of the Greek sources, the sources and structure of the Achaemenid Empire, method and theory, and center and periphery.⁴⁴ One should also mention J. Wiesehofer and U. Weber's bibliographical work on the Achaemenid Empire, which is the best bibliography done on any period of ancient Iranian history.⁴⁵

⁴²A.T. Olmstead, *History of the Persian Empire* (Chicago, 1959); N.C. Debevoise, *A Political History of Parthia* (Connecticut, 1970); A. Christensen, *L'Iran sous les Sasanides*, 2nd ed. (Copenhagen, 1944).

⁴³M.A. Dandamaev, *A Political History of the Achaemenid Empire* (Leiden, 1997); M.A. Dandamaev and V.G. Lukonin, *The Culture and Social Institutions of Ancient Iran* (New York, 2004).

⁴⁴H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg, *Sources, Structures and Syntheses*, Proceedings of the Groningen 1983 Achaemenid History Workshop (Leiden, 1987); H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg, *The Greek Sources*, Proceedings of the Groningen 1984 Achaemenid History Workshop (Leiden, 1987); H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg and A. Kuhrt, *Method and Theory*, Proceedings of the London 1985 Achaemenid History Workshop (Leiden, 1988); H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg and J.W. Drijvers, *The Roots of the European Tradition*, Proceedings of the 1987 Groningen Achaemenid History Workshop (Leiden, 1990); H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg and A. Kuhrt, *Centre and Periphery*, Proceedings of the Groningen 1986 Achaemenid History Workshop (Leiden, 1990); H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg and J.W. Drijvers, *Through Travellers' Eyes*, Proceedings of the Groningen 1989 Achaemenid History Workshop (Leiden, 1990); H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg and A. Kuhrt, *Asia Minor and Egypt: Old Cultures in a New Empire*, Proceedings of the Groningen 1988 Achaemenid History Workshop (Leiden, 1991); H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg, A. Kuhrt and M.C. Root, *Continuity and Change*, Proceedings of the Last Achaemenid History Workshop, 6–8 April 1990 (Ann Arbor, 1994); P. Briant, *Histoire de l'empire perse de Cyrus à Alexandre* (Leiden, 1996); M. Brosius and A. Kuhrt, eds, *Studies in Persian History Essays in Memory of David M. Lewis* (Leiden, 1998); M.B. Garrison and A. Kuhrt, *Persepolis Seal Studies: An Introduction with Provisional Concordances of Seal Numbers and Associated Documents on Fortification Tablets 1-2087* (Leiden, 1998).

⁴⁵J. Wiesehofer and U. Weber, *Das Reich der Achaimeniden: Eine Bibliographie*, AMI Ergänzungsband 15 (Berlin, 1996).

P. Briant revolutionized, revamped, and restructured Achaemenid history in his monumental work, *From Cyrus to Alexander*.⁴⁶ His internet project and serial publication of *Persika* have brought together scholars in varied fields working on the Achaemenid Empire from different perspectives and using different kinds of evidence.⁴⁷

For the Hellenic period and the Seleucids, the most important work is that of A. Kuhrt and S. Sherwin-White, who have completely changed our perception and the way historians look at this period in Iranian history.⁴⁸ Also, P. Briant has studied Alexander the Great in the context of Iranian history, making him only the last of the Achaemenid kings and the actualization of the Persian dream of a world empire. As for Arsacid history, far less attention has been given to it than to the Achaemenids or the Sasanians. Here, J. Wolski's Arsacid history and his many historiographical works and the continuation of them by his students in Poland, such as E. Dabrowa and his excellent journal *Electrum*, have created a new awareness of this Iranian dynasty.⁴⁹ J. Wiesehofer, who has been involved in all three periods of ancient Iranian history, brought together a series of articles by experts in the field to evaluate and recount the available sources and documentation for Arsacid Empire.⁵⁰ Notably, the Babylonian astronomical diaries are a very important new source for the Seleucid and early Arsacid history, where cuneiform was still in use in Mesopotamia.⁵¹ The journal *Parthica*, headed by A. Invernizi, has become the important venue for the study of Arsacid history.⁵² It is only K. Schippmann who has dealt with Arsacid political history in an important study on Roman-Iranian relations.⁵³ Finally, one must mention C.D. Hopkins's website *Parthia.com*, which is an indispensable source for the study of the Arsacid Empire and open to all to consult. This is certainly the way of the future, as the internet is already becoming an important source for ancient Iranian history.⁵⁴

As for the Sasanians, new insights into the period were made possible by the various archaeological and material culture work mentioned above. However, only one book has been written in any European language on the Sasanians

⁴⁶P. Briant, *Histoire de l'Empire Perse. De Cyrus à Alexandre* (Paris, 1996).

⁴⁷<http://www.achemenet.com>.

⁴⁸S. Sherwin-White, *From Samarkand to Sardis: A New Approach to the Seleucid Empire*, Amelie Kuhrt, (California Press, 1992).

⁴⁹J. Wolski, *L'Empire des Arsacides* (Gent, 1993); *Electrum, Studies in Ancient History* (1996).

⁵⁰J. Wiesehofer, ed., *Das Partherreich und seine Zeugnisse - Beiträge des Internationalen Colloquiums, Eutin (27–30 Juni 1996)* Historia-Einzelschriften 122 (Stuttgart, 1998).

⁵¹B. van der Spek, "New Evidence from the Babylonian Astronomical Diaries Concerning Seleucid and Arsacid history," *Archiv für Orientforschung*, vols. 44/45 (1997/1998): 167–175. So far six volumes have been published under the title, *Astronomical Diaries and Related Texts from Babylonia*, by H. Hunger, where the latest volume has been published by Eisenbrauns while the older volumes were published by the Austrian Academy.

⁵²*Parthica, Cultural Encounters in the Ancient World*, published in Torino, Italy since 1999.

⁵³K. Schippmann, *Grundzüge der parthischen Geschichte* (Darmstadt, 1980).

⁵⁴<http://www.parthia.com>.

and that has been by K. Schippmann, who concentrated on its political history.⁵⁵ The work of Alram and Gignoux has brought enough new sources to warrant the publication of a new volume on Sasanian history.⁵⁶ Finally, the website Sasanika must be mentioned, taking the lead from Achemenet.com and Parthia.com, bringing together recent scholarship and works on Sasanian Iran.⁵⁷

One should not lose sight of the fact that edited volumes on ancient Iran, along with festschrifts and memorial volumes, increasingly appear, which make it very difficult to have a complete bibliography of the field. Still one can and should consult not only the *Cambridge Ancient History*, but also the *Cambridge History of Iran*, along with the *Encyclopaedia Iranica*. These tools at the disposal of students and scholars give us much more material at hand than the gentlemen scholars of the nineteenth century and the earlier solitary works of archaeologists and travelers of the early twentieth century. One word of caution: it has become exceedingly difficult to study ancient Iran outside of the nationalist bind of the past century, especially after the revolution of 1979, where many Iranians have tried to see all that was glorious before the coming of Islam and the decline and weakness of Iran in the Islamic period. Thus, any critical encounter with the field is viewed by the populace, especially the exilic community as pro-Islamic and any glorification as pro-monarchist, anti-Islamic. Although this is a simplistic paradigm, it has become a factor in research and the way the study of ancient Iran is progressing. Still, one cannot deny the insufficient study and lack of interest in ancient Iran in the West because of Hellenocentrism and Eurocentrism, and within Iran because of the Islamic-Revolutionary agenda of the government. It is up to institutions, scholars, and enthusiasts to make it possible for this small field to bring to light some of the spectacular achievements of the Achaemenids, the Arsacids, and the Sasanians. This is important for understanding the development of world civilization, where Iran has had a significant, but yet unknown influence.

⁵⁵K. Schippmann, *Grunzüge der Sasanidische Reich* (Darmstadt, 1986).

⁵⁶T. Daryaee, *Sasanian Persia, The Rise and Fall of an Empire* (London, 2009); also, *Sasanian Iran (224–651 CE): Portrait of a Late Antique Empire* (Costa Mesa, 2009).

⁵⁷<http://www.sasanika.com>.

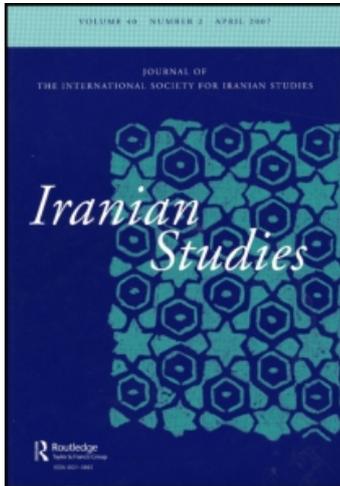
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The Study of Ancient Iran in the Twentieth Century

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