Detail from above the entrance of Tehran’s fire temple, 1286/1917–18. Photo by © Shervin Farridnejad
Contents

Notes

2. Touraj Daryae: Whipping the Sea and the Earth: Xerxes at the Hellespont and Yima at the Vara 04
3. Touraj Daryae; Nina Mazhjoo: Dancing in Middle & Classical Persian 10
4. Götz König: The Niyāyiṣn and the bagas (Brief comments on the so-called Xorde Avešta, 2) 16
7. Marc Morato: The Turkish Iranian emigration as perceived by the Maathir al-Umara (1544-1629) 39
8. Mohsen Zakeri: Survey of Šāhnāme sources 1. The so-called *Paykār and *Sagēsarān 44

Reviews


Obituary

Survey of Šāhnāme sources 1. The so-called *Paykār and *Sagēsarān

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[These titles are introduced and discussed in Zakeri, *Persian Wisdom in Arabic Garb*, I, p. 131-37].

The historian al-Mas'ūdī (d. 345/957) begins his recounting of the pre-Islamic history of Iran with the mythic stories of Kayūmarth (Gayomart), Awshanj (Hūshang), Luhrāsf, and others all the way to Afrāsyāb, of whom he says: The Persians have long tales to tell about his adventures, the circumstances of his death, the wars fought between the Persians and Turanians, the killing of Siyāwash, and the story of Ruštam son of Daštān; this is all recorded in detail in the book entitled *Furs al-ūlā* (variants *Furs al-ūla*, *Furs al-ulä*, etc.). Ibn al-Muqaffa' translated this from the old language of the Persians (*al-fārisiyya al-ūlā*) into Arabic. In this book, one finds also the story of Isfandyār son of Buštāsf (Goshtāsp) son of Luhrāsf, his death at the hands of Ruštam son of Daštān, members of the house of Ruštam whom Bahman son of Isfandyār killed taking revenge for his father, as well as other wondering stories of *al-Furs al-ūlā*. The Persians revere this book much for the stories and histories of their ancestors that it encompasses.¹ Further on,

while describing the geographical features of Caucasus, al-Mas'ūdī cites a book translated by Ibn al-Muqaffā', that contained, among other things, Istandyār’s quest in the East, his conquest of the proverbial دیز-ئ ریون 'Brass Fortress', as well as his erecting the fortress of باب al-Lān 'The gates of the Alans.' The name of the translator for this book, the reference to the hero Istandyār, and the form of the title imply that this is identical with the one above. It was the editor Barbier de Meynard, who suggested the reading السکیاران for these ambiguous forms, a farfetched conjecture that was later on adopted by A. Christensen, Ch. Pellat, and others without further ado.

A decade after finishing his multi-volume مروج al-dhahab, al-Mas'ūdī prepared a summary of it which he called تنبیح. While narrating the exploits of Rustam and Istandyār in خراسان, سیستان, زابلستان, etc., he relegates his readers to his مروج for more details on Iranian legends which, he says, the Persians call baykār (بابکار, it has no definite article). (تنبیح, p. 82). More than a century ago Josef Marquart ingenuously saw in this a title of a book and rather a better reading for the obscure السکیاران. Going back to the original we see that al-Mas'ūdī is certainly not talking about the title of a book; he explains the Arabicized Persian word baykār (پابکار) as ‘exertion of unbearable force’ and uses it properly as a general descriptive term. Subsequent generations of students accepted Marquart’s hasty emendation and cited it without further scrutiny as yet another Pahlavi book of epic and legend translated into Arabic. This assertion was taken for granted to the extent that in his newer edition of the مروج (I, 229), Charles Pellat simply amended سک/ ال to سک (al-Paykār) without even bothering to make a comment on the issues that such an emendation would raise. In a similar vein السکیاران, despite its ambiguity and all its numerous variants, was reconstructed as *Sagēsarān, and understood as ‘The chiefs of the Sakas’.

In short: A book *Paykār never existed. What is hidden behind the so-called *Sagēsarān defies an explanation and remains still a mystery. According to al-Mas'ūdī’s outline of its contents, the legends in this book were not limited to the Sištanian cycle of the Iranian epic, as the reconstructed title ‘The chiefs of the Sakas’ wants us to believe. Indeed, the references to this obscure title occur where al-Mas'ūdī

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4- J. Marquart, ZDMG 49 (1895), p. 639; cf. idem, Osteuropäische und ostasiatische Streifzüge. Leipzig 1903, p. 166; followed by A. Christensen, Les Kayanides, Copenhagen 1931, p. 143-44. For a review of these points consult Ahmad M. H. Shboul, al-Mas'udi and his world: a Muslim humanist and his interest in non-Muslims, London 1979, p. 105.
5- Today the Iranians use razm or nabad for this.
7- In this careless manner, Pellat has eliminated a number of very precious hints at the classical books known to al-Mas'ūdī. See M. Zakeri, "Das Pahlavi-Buch 'Kārwand' und seine Rolle bei der Entstehung der arabischen Rhetorik," Hallesche Beiträge 32:1-3 (2004), p. 839-58.
9- See C. Brockelmann, GAL SI, p. 234.
is reporting about the Kayanians, who were the legendary enemies of the Sakas. Here I would like to propose another reading for this by bringing in some additional factors which may help us to clarify it.

Traditionally the pre-Islamic Iranian pašt, both mythical and historical, is divided in the annals of Perso-Arabic hištoriography into four dištīnc_periods: Pēšdādīyān, Kayāniyān, Aškāniyān and Sāsāniyān. This division is assumed to have been recorded in the lošt Pahlavi Khudāynāmak (cf. Cambridge History of Iran, III.1, p. 366). This assumption is unwarranted, for a variety of other sources both written and oral could have contributed to the passage of that concept to the Muslims.

Al-Masʿūdī like many other Muslim hištorians before and after him follows the Iranian tradition and recognizes four periods in the pre-Islamic history of Iran: 1. al-Furs al-ūlā, who are khudāhān, in Arabic arbāb ‘Lords’, that is, the God-kings, or Law-givers (from Gayomart to Ferēdūn). 2. al-Askān (الAskān/الاسکان), who are the sons of the king (from Ferēdūn to Dārā). 3. Mulūk al-ṭawāʾif, (Petty Kings) who are the Parthians. 4. al-Furs al-thānīyya, who are the Sasanians. He repeats this division a second time elsewhere as: 1. Khudāhān, 2. Kayān (الکیان), 3. Parthians, and 4. Sasanians. He then adds that some early hištorians questioned the historical verity of the God-kings, disregarded them totally and opted for a threefold division of the pašt kingdoms as: 1. Khudāhān, 2. Kayān (الکیان), 3. Parthians, and 4. Sasanians.

Another group of hištorians on the other hand opted for a fivefold classification as: 1. al-ṭabaqat al-ūlā min mulūk al-Furs al-ūlā, (the first class of the ancient Persian kings) from Gayomart to Ferēdūn. 2. al-ṭabaqat al-thānīyya min mulūk al-furs al-ūlā, (the second class of the ancient Persian kings) who are BLAN (بلاي), meaning ‘illiyūn (الـ’اليويين? الـ’اواييييوين?) 3. al-ṭabaqat al-thāliṭa, (the third class of the ancient Persian kings) who are the Sasanrians, meaning al-‘a’izzā’ (الأعراب) ‘The Venerable,’ 4. Parthians, and 5. Sasanians.

At the bottom of the line, all such classifications of mythic, heroic and historical Iranian dynasties in Arabic and Persian sources go back to Zoroaṣṭrian religious legends, which divide the history of mankind into three periods: 1. The period of the Paradhāta (Av. para > Pah. pēš; Pēšdādīyān; cf. AirWb. Sp. 854), who initiated dāt i khuṭāth ‘The Laws of kingship’. 2. The period of the Pōryōtkēšān (Pah. > Av. pavorriō. 1kaēša), who were the first believers, or ancient sages; and 3. The period of the Nabānanzdāštā, who were the more recent people or ancestors (i.e. Parthians and Sasanians). Here Pōryōtkēšān ‘The first believers’ corresponds to Kayāniyān in later lišts (Av. Kauui-; AirWb. Sp. 442). The name of this class has been a source of confusion and is recorded diversely in the Arabic reports as seen above. This diversity reflects a lack of clear knowledge of the real form of the name and the attribute assigned to it.

In close proximity with the Zoroaṣṭrian tradition, Pēšdādīyān is rendered as al-Furs al-ūlā, and their

13- al-Masʿūdī, Tanbih, p. 79-87; al-Birūnī, Ḩathār, p. 102.
16- E.g., Kayānians, al-Askāni, al-Askan, the Askāns, the Aškāniyān, the Aškāniyān, the Aškāniyān, the Aškāniyān.
primary aspect dāt i khutāīh, in form of khudāhān, has become a synonym to their name. In al-Bīrūnī’s account of this, Pēšdādiyān are al-ādilūn “the Just” [notice: dāt => ‘adl], who brought laws, practiced equity on earth and worshiped god.\[17\]

Al-Mas‘ūdi characterized the Kayanian or Pōryōtkēšān as al-a’ izzā’ ‘The Venerable’, ‘the Powerful’, and al-Ṭabarī gives them the attribute al-tanzīh ‘Pure, free from blemish’, in the sense of rūḥānī, ‘Virtuous’.\[18\] It is likely that where al-Mas‘ūdi says Kayanian, who are al-Mas‘ūdī had a predilection for citing the originals of Persian texts. We find some of the most

19- Perhaps the same as بلان = بلان Aylān, has the aspect ‘illiyyūn ‘Heavenly’ or ‘Celestial’,\[20\] [perhaps an Arabic rendering of Manuščihr (=> Manučihr => Manujir, etc.) ‘Of heavenly origin’, plural “Manuščhrān”; and the third dynasty of al-Kayān (Kayāniyān) are al-jabābira ‘the Giants’.\[21\] O. Klima interpreted the alif in بلان as the old sign of the genitive form in Persian writing and read: i yalān “of heroes’, a construction that makes little sense in this context.\[22\] Al-Bīrūnī (al-Āthār al-bāqiya, p. 102) gives for it which could be Aryan or Iranian (aylān = Īrān, the Arians). Ayrān appears once again in al-Mas‘ūdi’s account of the tripartite division of the world by Ferēdūn among his sons whose name he records as Salm, Ṭūj, and Īraj. Ibn Khurdādbih explains “Īrān, who is Īraj” (Masālik, p. 15). Ayrān: in the Avesta airiiāuua- ‘Helpers of the Arian nation’.\[23\] [According to tradition, when Ferēdūn divided the earth among his sons Salm, Ṭūj (i.e. Tur), and Īraj, he gave as a share to each one of them a third of the inhabited world and wrote a deed for them. Al-Nadīm heard Amād [Omīd] al-Mawbad (Mobed) saying that the deed is with the King of China, carried away with the Persian treasures at the time of Yazdjird. (al-Nadīm, F. p. 15; cf. Dodge, p. 23.)]

With this said, we now return to the issue of “Sagēsarān.

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precious notes on Pahlavi literature in his works. He was familiar with Ibn al-Muqaffa’s writings and wrote enthusiastically about his erudition and wit, yet he did not cite his *Khudāynāmak* more than once in passing. The *Khudāynāmak* must have been a fluid text that had not yet been stabilized at the time al-Mas‘ūdī wrote. The *Khudāynāmak* which he knew was most likely not the one we think to know. A Pahlavi book under this title may have indeed comprised only legends related to the oldest layers of mythic epoch, the cosmogonic period in which *Khudāhān* ruled, as the title seems to suggest. In the course of time the narratives which had evolved around the members of this mythic dynasty of god-kings were supplemented by another independent collection mainly of myths pertaining to the second dynasty, the Pōryōtkēshān-Kayanian cycle.²⁴ It is the title of this second book that seems to be hidden behind the puzzling Arabic *يَز، كِز، يَز، الِِكَ، البَكِ، الِِيَز، الِِيَكَ، كِزكش، الِِبَ، كِس الِِيَز، الِِيَكَ، كِز*.

These are corrupted forms of what could well have been attempts at rendering the Pahlavi word Pōryōtkēshān, which in Arabic letters can become, among others, الِِبَ، البَكِ، البَكِ، البَيُش، الِِبَ، كِس الِِيَز، الِِيَكَ، كِز* contracled into الِِبَ، البَكِ، البَكِ، البَيُش، الِِبَ، كِس الِِيَز، الِِيَكَ، كِز, etc. The books *Khudāhān* and *Pōryōtkēshān*, both translated separately by Ibn al-Muqaffa, were conflated into one narrative later known as *Khudāynāmak* in the course of systematization of the past records in early ⁴ᵗʰ/¹⁰ᵗʰ century. Together they contained many of the tales we know today from the Arabic writing historians and the Šāhnāme about the mythic and heroic, but not historic, periods of Iranian past.

²⁴ According to al-Mas‘ūdī’s information (*Murūj*, I, p. 267), the book *Sagēsarān* covered the oldest layer of Iranian chronology including خداهان and *Khudāhān*. The sections on ancient Iran in the famed *Nihāyat al-arab* have the verisimilitude of being based on Ibn al-Muqaffa’s *loṣṭ Siyar al-mulūk*. (see Khaṭībī). This contained a version of the story of Rusṭam and Isfandyār and could have been identical with the text the contour of which we just outlined. (cf. Browne, 1890, p. 205-22, with the translation of the relevant piece there).
Classical Authors

Eutychius (i.e. Sa‘îd b. al-Biṭriq, d. 328/).
Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī (wrote in 351/)
Al-Maqdisi, Abū Naṣr Muṭahhar b. Ṭāhir (d. c. 355/):
Al-Tha‘ālibi (d. 429/)

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