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*xšnaoθrahe ahurahe mazdā*

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

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# Contents

## Notes

1. Keenan **Baca-Winters**: Victorious: The “Arrogance” of Šāhanšāh Xusrō Parvīz **01**
2. Touraj **Daryaee**: Whipping the Sea and the Earth: Xerxes at the Hellespont and Yima at the Vara **04**
3. Touraj **Daryaee**; Nina **Mazhjo**: Dancing in Middle & Classical Persian **10**
4. Götz **König**: The *Niyāyišn* and the *bagas* (Brief comments on the so-called Xorde Avesta, 2) **16**
5. Daštūr Firoze **M. Kotwal**: *Jamshīdī Nō-Rūz* : Fačts v/s Myth **25**
6. Lloyd **Llewellyn-Jones**: An orgy of Oriental dissipation? Some thoughts on the ‘Camel *lekythos*’ **31**
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

1. Vahé S. **Boyajian**: Asatrian, Garnik S. & Viktoria Arakelova. 2014. *The religion of the Peacock Angel: the Yezidis and their spirit world*. (Gnoštica: Texts & Interpretations). Durham, UK: Routledge. 157 pp., £63.00, ISBN 978-1-84465-761-2. **50**
2. Touraj **Daryaee**: Shahbazi, A. Shapur, *Tārīḥ-e sāsānīān*. *Tarjome-ye baḥš-e sāsānīān az ketāb-e tārīḥ-e Ṭabarī va moqāyese-ye ān bā tārīḥ-e Bal‘amī [Sasanian History. Translation of the Sasanian Section from the History of Ṭabarī and its Commparission with the History of Bal‘amī]*, Tehran, Iran University Press, 1389š/2010. Pp. 811. ISBN 978-964-01-1393-6. **53**
3. Shervin **Farridnejad**: Timuș, Mihaela. 2015. *Cosmogonie et eschatologie: articulations conceptuelles du système religieux zoroāstrien*. (Cahiers de Studia Iranica 54). Paris: Peeters Press. 288 pp., €30.00, ISBN 978-2-910640-40-8. **55**
4. Lloyd **Llewellyn-Jones**: Briant, Pierre. 2015. *Darius in the shadow of Alexander*. (Trans.) Jane Marie Todd. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press. 608 pages, \$39.95, ISBN 9780674493094. **57**
5. Lloyd **Llewellyn-Jones**: Bridges, Emma. 2014. *Imagining Xerxes: ancient perspectives on a Persian king*. (Bloomsbury Studies in Classical Reception). New York: Bloomsbury Academic. 256 pp., £65.00, ISBN 9781472514271. **59**

## Obituary

1. Ehsan **Shavarebi**: Malek Iradj Mochiri (1927–2015) **61**

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

Mohsen Zakeri  
Georg-August-Universität Göttingen

[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 Ruṣtam son of Daštān; this is all recorded in detail in the book entitled السككين (variants النسكين, البتكين, 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 Ruṣtam son of Daštān, members of the house of Ruṣtam 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.<sup>1</sup> Further on,

<sup>1</sup>- *Murūj al-dhahab wa-ma'ādin al-jawhar*, 7 vols. ed. Charles Pellat, Beirut 1965-79, I, p. 267, 268; *Prairies d'or*, texte arabe et traduction française du *Muruj al-dhahab* par Barbier de Meynard et Pavet de Courteille, Paris 1861-1877, II, p. 118, 447.

while describing the geographical features of Caucasus, al-Mas'ūdī cites a book *البنكش* (variant *السكس*), translated by Ibn al-Muqaffa', that contained, among other things, Isfandyār's quest in the East, his conquest of the proverbial *Diž-e rū'in* 'Brass Fortress', as well as his erecting the fortress of Bāb al-Lān 'The gates of the Alans.'<sup>2</sup> The name of the translator for this book, the reference to the hero Isfandyār, 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 *السكيران* 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 *Murūj al-dhahab*, al-Mas'ūdī prepared a summary of it which he called *al-Tanbīh*.<sup>3</sup> While narrating the exploits of Rūstam and Isfandyār in Khurasan, Sijīstān, Zābulīstān, etc., he relegates his readers to his *Murūj* for more details on Iranian legends which, he says, the Persians call *baykār* (بيكار, it has no definite article). (*Tanbīh*, p. 82). More than a century ago Josef Marquart ingeniously saw in this a title of a book and rather a better reading for the obscure *البنكش / السكس*.<sup>4</sup> 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* (<= *paykār* 'combat') as 'exertion of unbearable force' and uses it properly as a general descriptive term.<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup> This assertion was taken for granted to the extent that in his newer edition of the *Murūj* (I, 229), Charles Pellat simply amended *بيكار* to *البيكار* (al-Paykār) without even bothering to make a comment on the issues that such an emendation would raise.<sup>7</sup> In a similar vein *السككين*, despite its ambiguity and all its numerous variants, was reconstructed as \*Sagēsārān, and understood as 'The chiefs of the Sakas'.<sup>8</sup>

In short: A book \**Paykār* never existed. What is hidden behind the so-called \*Sagēsārān 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 Sīstānian cycle of the Iranian epic, as the reconstructed title 'The chiefs of the Sakas' wants us to believe.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, the references to this obscure title occur where al-Mas'ūdī

2- *Murūj*, ed. Pellat, I, p. 229; ed. Barbier de Meynard, II, p. 44.

3- *Kitāb al-Tanbīh wa-al-ishraf*, ed. 'Abdallāh Ismā'īl al-Ṣāwī. Cairo 1938.

4- J. Marquart, *ZDMG* 49 (1895), p. 639; cf. idem, *Osteuropäische und ostantische 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'ūdī and his world: a Muslim humanist and his interest in non-Muslims*, London 1979, p. 105.

5- Today the Iranians use *razm* or *nabard* for this.

6- See for example Dhabīh Allāh Ṣafā, *Ḥamāsa-surāi dar Īran*, Tehran 1363 š., p. 45-47, 568-69; and Muḥammad Muḥammadī, *Farhang-e Īrānī-ye pīsh az Islām*, Tehran 1374 š., p. 166-67.

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.

8- A. Christensen, *Les Kayanides*, p. 142-44; idem, *Les Gestes des Rois dans les traditions de l'Iran antique*, Paris 1936 (p. 57) speaks of *Paykār-nāmagh*, *Saghēsārān-nāmagh*, next to *Kay-Lohrāsp-nāmagh* by 'Alī b. 'Ubayda al-Rayḥānī.

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 historiography into four distinct periods: Pēšdādiyān, 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-Mas'ūdī like many other Muslim historians 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* (الاسكان/الأشكان), who are السكونون, السكون (from Ferēdūn to Dārā). 3. *Mulūk al-ṭawā'if*, (Petty Kings) who are the Parthians. 4. *al-Furs al-thāniyya*, who are the Sasanians.<sup>10</sup> He repeats this division a second time elsewhere as: 1. *Khudāhān*, 2. *Kayān* (الكيان), 3. Parthians, and 4. Sasanians.<sup>11</sup> He then adds that some early historians questioned the historical verity of the God-kings, disregarded them totally and opted for a threefold division of the pašt kingdoms as: 1. الاكسيان (variants الاشكدان, الاسكبان, الاسكنان, الاسكيان). 2. Parthians. 3. Sasanians.<sup>12</sup> Another group of historians 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-thāniyya min mulūk al-furs al-ūlā*, (the second class of the ancient Persian kings) who are BLAN (بلان), meaning 'illiyūn (al-'ulwiyyūn? al-'alawiyyūn?) 3. *al-ṭabaqat al-thālitha*, (the third class of the ancient Persian kings) who are الكيانيون, meaning *al-'izzā*' (الأعزاء) 'The Venerable,' 4. Parthians, and 5. Sasanians.<sup>13</sup>

At the bottom of the line, all such classifications of mythic, heroic and historical Iranian dynasties in Arabic and Persian sources go back to Zoroastrian religious legends, which divide the history of mankind into three periods: 1. The period of the Paradhāta (Av. para > Pah. pēš; Pēšdādiyān; cf. *AirWb. Sp.* 854), who initiated *dāt ī khutāih* 'The Laws of kingship'. 2. The period of the Pōryōtkēšān (Pah. > Av. paoirriō. ṭkaēšā-), who were the first believers, or ancient sages,<sup>14</sup> and 3. The period of the Nabānazdišta, who were the more recent people or ancestors (i.e. Parthians and Sasanians).<sup>15</sup> Here Pōryōtkēšān 'The first believers' corresponds to Kayāniyān in later lists (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.<sup>16</sup> 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 Zoroastrian tradition, Pēšdādiyān is rendered as *al-Furs al-ūlā*, and their

10- *Murūj*, ed. Pellat, I, p. 244; ed. Barbier de Meynard, II, p. 77.

11- *Murūj*, ed. Pellat, I, p. 324; ed. Barbier de Meynard, II, 237. Following al-Mas'ūdī, Ibn Badrūn (*Sharḥ Qaṣīdat Ibn 'Abdūn*, Leiden 1846, p. 9) gives: 1. الجرهانية; 2. كيانية; 3. Parthians; 4. Sasanians.

12- al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj*, ed. Pellat, I, p. 275-76; ed. Barbier de Meynard, II, p. 134, 448.

13- al-Mas'ūdī, *Tanbih*, p. 79-87; al-Bīrūnī, *Āthār*, p. 102.

14- In *Pandnāmak ī Zartuxšt* (ed. Kanga, 1:4): Pōryōtkēšān ī fratom-dānišnān.

15- A. Christensen, *Les types du premier homme et du premier roi dans l'histoire légendaire des Iraniens*, 2 vols., Stockholm 1917, reprint Leiden 1934, I, 11f, 129f.

16- E. g. الكيانيون، الاكسيان، الكيان، الاسكيان، الاسكبان، السكنان، الاسكان، الأشكان، الاشكدان. . g.

primary aspect *dāt ī khutāih*, in form of *khudāhān*, has become a synonym to their name. In al-Bīrūnī's account of this, Pēšdādīyān are *al-ādilūn* "the Just" [notice: *dāt* => 'adl], who brought laws, practiced equity on earth and worshiped god.<sup>17</sup>

Al-Mas'ūdī 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'.<sup>18</sup> It is likely that where al-Mas'ūdī says Kayanian, who are السكونون, السكونون, he is referring to their attribute Pōryōtkēšān.

In al-Mas'ūdī's fivefold division, the interpolated second dynasty BLAN (i.e. ايلان = بلان Aylān),<sup>19</sup> has the aspect 'illiyūn 'Heavenly' or 'Celestial',<sup>20</sup> [perhaps an Arabic rendering of Manuščihr (=> Manučihhr => Manujihhr, etc.) 'Of heavenly origin', plural \*Manuščihrān]; and the third dynasty of al-Kayān (Kayāniyān) are *al-jabābira* 'the Giants'.<sup>21</sup> O. Klima interpreted the *alif* in ايلان 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.<sup>22</sup> Al-Bīrūnī (*al-Āthār al-bāqiya*, p. 102) gives ايران for it which could be Aryan or Iranian (aylān = Īrān, the Aryans). Ayrān appears once again in al-Mas'ūdī's account of the tripartite division of the world by Ferēdūn among his sons whose name he records as Salm, Ṭūj, and Ayrān/Īrān (i.e. Salm, Tūr, and Īraj). Ibn Khurdābih explains "Īrān, who is Īraj" (*Masālik*, p. 15). Ayrān: in the Avesta Airya; OP Ariya- see *Airiianəm X'arənō* > *Aryān Xurrah* > *Farr-e Ērān[šahr]* (Bailey, p. 22); Sanskrit Arya; Pah. Ērān "noble; free" (ēr + ān); = ērānvēj (Av. Airyana.vaējangh), abridged to Īraj who was, according to the ŠN, called Īrān khudā (i.e. considered to be one of the God-kings of the Khudāhān). Īraj's grandchild Manuščihr took his revenge by killing Salm and Tūr and became the sole ruler of Iran, the head of a new dynasty of Iranians (ايلانيون < ايرانيون), in the Avesta airiiauuu- 'Helpers of the Arian nation'.<sup>23</sup>

[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 \*Sagēsārān.

Al-Mas'ūdī had a predilection for citing the originals of Persian texts. We find some of the most

17- *al-Āthār al-bāqiya* 'an *al-qurūn al-khāliya*, ed. Sachau, Leipzig 1878, p. 102-4.

18- al-Ṭabarī, *al-Ta'riḫ*, ed. Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm, Cairo 1967, I, p. 213.

19- Perhaps the same as ايلان, plural of *yal* 'hero', an attribute of Isfandyār in the *Ayātkār ī Zarērān*, ed. Davoud Monchi-zadeh, Uppsala 1981, #s 61, 67, 113, 114.

20- al-Mas'ūdī, *Tanbih*, p. 79-87; cf. J. Modi, "al-Mas'ūdī's account of the Pešdadian kings," *JCOI* 27 (1935), p. 6-32. Sachau (p. 111) reads 'ulwiyyūn and translates it as: 'the people of the highlands!'

21- Cf. al-Bīrūnī, *al-Āthār*, ed. Sachau, p. 102-4. For more details consult Jivanji Jamshedji Modi, "Zarathuštira and Zoroastrianism in Maḥūdī's 'Kitāb-i Muruj al-Zahab va Ma'adan al-Jauhar'," *Journal of the K. R. Cama Oriental Institute* 25, 1933, p. 148-58; idem, "Mas'ūdī's Account of the Pešdadian Kings," *Journal of the K. R. Cama Oriental Institute* 27, 1933, p. 6-35.

22- Otaker Klíma, "Wie sah die persische Geschichtsschreibung in der vorislamischen Periode aus?" *ArOr* 36 (1968), 213-32, at p. 222.

23- Christian Bartholomae, *Altiranisches Wörterbuch*, Strassburg 1904, 198. For other interpretations of the word see Arthur Christensen, *Études sur le zoroastrisme de la Perse antique*, Copenhagen 1928, p. 23.

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 Pōryōtkēšān-Kayanian cycle.<sup>24</sup> It is the title of this second book that seems to be hidden behind the puzzling Arabic السكس البنكش، السكيكين، التيككين، النسكين. These are corrupted forms of what could well have been attempts at rendering the Pahlavi word Pōryōtkēšān, which in Arabic letters can become, among others, البريتكيش/البريتكيس، contracted into البتكيس، اليتكيش، etc. The books *\*Khudāhān* and *\*Pōryōtkēšān*, 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 4<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> 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.

The sections on ancient Iran in the famed *Nihāyat al-arab* have the verisimilitude of being based on Ibn al-Muqaffa's lost *Siyar al-mulūk*. (see Khaṭībī). This contained a version of the story of Ruštam 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).

24- According to al-Mas'ūdī's information (*Murūj*, I, p. 267), the book *\*Sagēsārān* covered the oldest layer of Iranian chronology including خداهان and کیان.

## Classical Authors

Eutychius (i.e. Sa'īd b. al-Biṭrīq, d. 328/).

Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī (wrote in 351/)

Al-Maqdisī, Abū Naṣr Muṭahhar b. Ṭāhir (d. c. 355/):

Al-Tha'ālibī (d. 429/)

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