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BELLES LETTRES I. SASANIAN IRAN

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Belles lettres in Middle Iranian literatures. Belles lettres, that is, entertaining works, are not lacking in Sasanian Iran but can by no means match with their development in New Persian literature, both for quality and quantity.

Among the Middle Iranian literatures the most important specimens are attested in the Middle Persian (Pahlavi) literature of the Zoroastrians. Next to the Zoroastrian literature the Manichean parable texts deserve to be mentioned. Entertaining works are also preserved in the Parthian and Sogdian literature of the Manicheans (parables), the Sogdian and Khotanese literature of the Buddhists (*Jātaka* and *Avadāna* stories), and the Sogdian literature of the Christians (legends of saints, an enigma text). They are all linked to the religious literature of the community and meant to educate and uplift the believer. It is only in the Zoroastrian literature that specimens of secular works can be singled out. They treat of worldly affairs and ideas, but they, too, presuppose the principles of their own religion.

On the non-Persian Middle Iranian belles lettres, see in particular: Sundermann, 1973, esp. pp. 83-109; Colditz, 1987, pp. 274-313; W. B. Henning, “Sogdian Tales,” *BSOAS* 11, 1945, pp. 465-87; W. Sundermann, *Ein manichäisch-*

soghdisches Parabelbuch, Berliner Turfantexte XV, Berlin 1985; E. Benveniste, *Vessantara Jātaka*, Paris 1946; W. Sundermann, "A Fragment of the Buddhist *Kāñcarasāra* Legend in Sogdian and its Manuscript" (forthcoming); R. E. Emmerick, *A Guide to the Literature of Khotan*, Tokyo, 1992, pp. 20, 30-31; N. Sims-Williams, *The Christian Sogdian Manuscript C2*, Berliner Turfantexte XII, Berlin 1985, esp. pp. 31-64, 137-64; W. Sundermann, "Der Schüler fragt den Lehrer. Eine Sammlung biblischer Rätsel in soghdischer Sprache," in *A Green Leaf. Papers in Honour of Professor Jes P. Asmussen*, Acta Iranica 28, Leiden 1988, pp. 173-86.

Middle Persian belles lettres in Sasanian Iran. In this overview I will concentrate on entertaining literature belonging to specific text groups which may be regarded as less focused on instruction and ritual than others. They can be characterized and arranged (1) according to formal criteria which appear in texts with certain kinds of contents, and (2) according to the level of artistic perfection. Formal criteria allow us to distinguish between epic, romance, courtly lyrics, fairy tales, parables, gnomic (*andarz*) and didactic texts.

Both the epic and the romance treat of the heroic achievements of the nobility, or of love affairs of famous couples. Fairy tales and parables are narrative like the epics and romances but do not claim to be factual reality. They display the fanciful world of magic and supernatural events, persons and other living beings, with the intention, in the case of parables, to illustrate a didactic truth and admonition. Gnomes and instructive tracts convey ideas with a view to spiritually enrich, that is, enlighten and instruct, listeners and readers, and lyrics are meant to arouse erotic, elegiac, idyllic, and other emotions.

The artistic level of entertaining literature depends on whether literary compositions are simple prose texts or texts refined by stylistic means, that is, constructed as verse texts with specific embellishments. The majority of entertaining literary works presumably consisted of prose texts: romances, fairy-tales, parables, didactic texts and part of the gnomic works. The epic works and many of the gnomic texts were versified.

This scheme has two drawbacks. Firstly, it is a somewhat ideal and certainly simpified construction of a defectively and sparsely attested corpus of literature. Epic and romance are overwhelmingly attested only in Arabic and New Persian translations and adaptations. The same is true of the large parable collection *Kalīla wa Dimna*. The existence of Middle Persian fairy tales

is documented by brief notes in Arabic works. Gnomic and didactic works, however, are relatively well preserved in Middle Persian as well as in later renderings.

Secondly, the perhaps most popular and highly entertaining work of Pahlavi literature, the often copied and even illustrated *Ardā Wirāz nāmag*, the story of saint Wirāz's travel to heaven and hell and purgatory (Gignoux, 1984; Vahman, 1986), falls through the net as an exception to the rule. This holds also more or less true in the case of the legendary life of Zoroaster as it is transmitted in the seventh book of the *Dēnkard* and in the *Selections of Zād Sparam* (Molé, 1967).

Zoroastrian epics and romances. The main sources in Middle Persian are the following: *Ayādgār ī Zarērān* (ed. Monchi-Zadeh, 1981; for earlier editions). *Kārnāmag ī Ardašīr ī Pābakān*, (ed. Chunakova, 1987; q.v. for earlier editions, among which Th. Nöldeke's is still valuable for its commentary; F. Grenet, *La geste d'Ardashir fils de Pâbag*, Die, 2003). *Wizārišn ī čatrag ud nihišn ī nēw-ardašīr* (ed. A. Panaino, 1999). The main sources in New Persian or Arabic are the following: Abo'l-Qāsem Ferdowsi, *Šāh-nāma* (ed. Vullers, 1877-84; ed. Moscow, 1960-71; ed. Dj. Khaleghi-Motlagh, vols. 1-5, 1988-97 [up to Dārā b. Dārāb]; q.v. for earlier editions). Ṯaʿālebī, *Ḡorar aḵbār molūk al-fors* (ed. Zotenberg, 1900). Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīḵ al-rosol waʾl-molūk* (ed. de Goeje et. al., 1881-82). Faḵr-al-Din Gorgāni, *Vis o Rāmin* (ed. M. Minovi, Tehran, 1314/1935). Other Arabic and New Persian sources are quoted and described in Christensen, 1932, pp. 106-46; Yarshater, 1983, pp. 359-66.

Works in Arabic and New Persian Languages. Only two works of heroic character in Middle Persian are preserved, the *Ayādgār ī Zarērān*, an epic transmitted as a prose text but with a recognizable metrical structure, and the *Kārnāmag ī Ardašīr ī Pābakān*, a romance rather that an epic. They are also incorporated into the *Šāh-nāma*. (I regard the *Wizārišn ī čatrag* as a third specimen.) What has come down to us is the tiny remnant of a once enormous bulk of literature that has been lost or is, if still accessible, preserved only in New Persian or Arabic translations. This concerns mainly the renderings of the Middle Persian *Xwadāy nāmag*, but also pertains to additional sources used by Ṭabari, Ferdowsi, Ṯaʿālebi, and others. Of these renderings Ferdowsi's has best preserved and developed the epic spirit of the Middle Persian sources. For methodological reasons it is advisable to treat this post-Sasanian literary complex first.

Ferdowsi's great epic goes back, according to the so-called old preface of the *Šāh-nāma* (Minorsky, 1956, pp. 159-79 = 1964, pp. 260-73), to an older prose *Šāh-nāma*, commissioned in 957 by the Lord of Tus, Abu Manṣur Moḥammad ʿAbd al-Razzāq. As the *Xwadāy nāmag*, the "Book of the Lords," this was one of the New Persian and Arabic renderings of the national historiographic and epic tradition of ancient Iran after that of Ebn al-Moqaffaʿ; the latter had been compiled to cover the period up to the 7th century under the last Sasanian king Yazdegerd III (Nöldeke, 1920, p. 14) and briefly after his end (Shahbazi, 1990, p. 214). If we may regard the *basilikai diphtherai* "royal parchments" known to Agathias as an epic collection of the same character (Gershevitch, 1968, p. 10), then an early redaction of the work would have existed already by the end of the sixth century. The old Middle Persian title of the work is preserved in the *Mojmal al-tawāriḵ wa'l-qeṣaṣ* of Ḥamza al-Eṣfahāni, who translated it as *Taʾriḵ molūk al-fors* "History of the Persian kings" (Shahbazi, 1991, p. 35, n. 78; cf. Nöldeke, 1920, p. 15, who also mentions Ebn al-Nadim's *Fehrest*). Taken as a whole, the *Xwadāy nāmag* was not only an epic. It was also history, and it was conceived as a world history focused on Iran. As such it was a theological construction which might have been the work of Zoroastrian priests (see Nöldeke, p. 2; Boyce, 1968, p. 58). But the relatively modest part played by Zoroaster in this work is remarkable.

The *Xwadāy nāmag* as the great compilation of the heroic and romantic traditions of ancient Iran was a "Book of the Kings" in so far as its matter was arranged according to the sequence of the rulers. This follows clearly from its New Persian rendering, the *Šāh-nāma*. Kings of the *Pēšdād* dynasty were also the main actors in the primeval time of human genesis, from king Gayumart to Jamašid, the splendid ruler of the world. But Jamšid's hybris, his claim to divine dignity, put an end to the almighty power of royalty and led to the first great catastrophe of mankind, the tyrannical rule of Ẓaḥḥāk. The period between this catastrophe and the second one, the takeover of Alexander the Greek, is the time of good (Qobād) and even model kings (Ḵosrow), but of foolish and haughty (Kay Kāʾus), narrow-minded and jealous (Goštāsp), and even cruel (Nuẕar) kings, too. They all depend on the loyalty and power of their aristocratic retinue, for example, Kay Kāʾus on Rostam, Lord of Sistān, and Goštāsp on his son and heir apparent Esfandiār. When with Dārāb and Dārā the time of the Achaemenians follows, the tradition dwindles away. The third period, between the rule of Alexander and the conquest of Islam, is the historical part of Iran's past, with no reminiscences of the Seleucids and hardly more of the Arsacids. The dynastic history of the Sasanians, however, is

well represented, and the work regains much of its character as a book of kings. A detailed and all-encompassing overview of the mythical and historical past of Iran as it is reflected in the *Xwadāy nāmag* is given in Yarshater, 1983, pp. 411-77.

The highlight of the *Xwadāy nāmag* was certainly its second part, the time from Zaḥḥāk to Alexander, in which the achievements of the magnates of Iran, their merits, errors and misdeeds, prevail. Besides, the mythical ambience gives more room to poetic fantasy than the later historic times. So it may not have been Ferdowsi's genius alone which made this part a masterpiece of epic poetry. But there is reason enough to assume that it was Ferdowsi who in masterly fashion worked out the tragic character of the fights between Rostam and his unrecognized son Sohrāb or between Rostam and Esfandiār, the hero of faith, and so made his rendering of the Iranian heroic myth a piece of world literature. But such episodes as the fight of Rostam and Sohrāb are not Ferdowsi's inventions, even if this event did not belong to the text of the *Xwadāy nāmag* (Hansen, 1954, p. 159); parallels in the Old High German *Hildebrandslied* (8th-9th cents.) and related texts in other languages (see E. Erb, *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur* Ia, Berlin, 1982, pp. 167-68) allow the question whether the Iranian saga preserves an old Indo-European motive.

But the epic gave also room for love stories and erotic events such as the romance of Bižan and Maniža in the *Šāh-nāma* (where the two heroes bear names of Parthian form), or the New Persian epic of *Vis o Rāmin*, which is of Parthian origin (Minorsky, 1964).

The epic tradition of ancient Iran was not only preserved in secular works such as those mentioned above. It also left its traces in some works of the clerical tradition, such as the *Dēnkard*, the *Bundahišn*, and the *Wizīdagīhā ī Zādsparam*, which draw on the Sasanian *Avesta* (Christensen, 1932, pp. 39, 69-99). Some details of the epic tradition are briefly referred to in the extant *Avesta*, mainly in the *Yašt*s and in the *Vidēvdād* (Nöldeke, 1920, pp. 1-2; Christensen, 1932, pp. 17-27). These are its most ancient attestations known to us. No less ancient may be the casual reports of Greek writers on Old Iranian tales of epic character, such as the story of Hystaspēs and Zariadrēs in Athēnaios's *Deipnosophistai* (Athenaios, 1985, pp. 354-56; see Nöldeke 1920, pp. 2-4; Gershevitch, 1968, pp. 2-3, 10).

Theodor Nöldeke regarded all these traditions as part of a general "nationale Überlieferung," the common property of aristocracy and clergy (Nöldeke,

1920, p. 14), not without distinguishing between clerical and other formations of this tradition (Nöldeke, 1920, p. 2). Spiegel, too, had already noticed that events of the national history had been rendered with characteristic differences in the secular and religious literature of the Zoroastrians (Spiegel, 1871, pp. 492-93). This induced Christensen to distinguish between a *tradition nationale* and a *tradition religieuse ou sacerdotale pur* of the Kayanian circle (Christensen, 1932, pp. 35-43). National and religious tradition mean in Christensen's understanding the traditions of worldly affairs of the past in the worldly or religious works of the Zoroastrians. Christensen regarded the religious tradition as an unbroken continuum from Arsacid times on, the national tradition, however, as a product of the Sasanian period, beginning in the fifth century and composed by *les savants et les poètes* (Christensen, 1932, pp. 39-41; 1936, pp. 27-33). He had first regarded the secular tradition as filled with the *sentiment national des Perses* (Christensen 1932, p. 40), but later he recognized the *esprit féodal* as the characteristic of the Iranian heroic epic (Christensen, 1936, p. 141; Boyce preserves the concept of a "national tradition" but restricts it to the creation of the *Xwadāy-nāmag*, 1968, p. 58, n. 2). Christensen interpreted the, as he thought, succession of religious and secular literature as a far-reaching dependence of the latter one on the religious tradition.

What Christensen did not recognize and describe exactly was the role of the professional group of minstrels (Parth. *gōsānān*, MP. *huniyāgarān*) and storytellers (NP. *afsāna-gūyān, naqqālhā*) as transmitters of the epic tradition, who passed on eulogies, epics, parables, and fairy tales orally. Their existence was proved and their importance underlined in 1954 by Mary Boyce. She argued for a continuous oral tradition of courtly minstrels (*gōsānān*) as the mainstream of secular poetry (Boyce, 1954, pp. 45-52; 1968, pp. 55-56). She found confirmation for her assumption of the role of minstrels in a Parthian Manichean text (Boyce, 1957, p. 31) which mentions the *gōsān* (sing.) in a somewhat disparaging way (see Sundermann, 1997, pp. 80-81, sec. 80).

Both theses, it seems, rather supplement than exclude each other (see Gershevitch, 1968, p. 25). The continuous oral transmission of epic tales in the minstrel tradition is established beyond doubt (see, for the early attestation of Median court minstrels, Gershevitch, 1968, pp. 2-3). On the other hand, many figures of the national tradition were already mentioned in the Avesta, namely the mythical kings from Gayumart (Av. Gayō.marətan-) to Goštāsp (Av. Vīštāspa-), some of their vassals like Tus (Av. Tusa-), Zarir (Av. Zairi.vairi-),

Esfandiār (Av. Spəntōδāta-), and many of their enemies, for example, Afrāsiāb (Av. Fraŋrasiiān-) and Arjāsp (Av. Arəǰaṭ.aspa-).

This observation is well in keeping with the fact that the Sasanian epic largely draws on the Eastern Iranian tradition preserved in the *Avesta* and almost completely disregards the Western Iranian epic tales of the Persians and Medes (Nöldeke, 1920, p. 2; Boyce 1968, p. 32).

The dependence of the "national" on the religious tradition is largely obscured by the fact that most pieces of the national tradition are only preserved in New Persian or Arabic translations, that is, in renderings written by Muslims for Muslims. The inevitable consequence was the elimination of specifically Zoroastrian matters (Christensen, 1932, p. 126). A careful textual comparison of some pieces of the national tradition with matching parts of the religious tradition, undertaken by Christensen, confirms in many cases not only the peculiarities of the traditions but also the priority of the religious text (Christensen, 1932, pp. 41, 126). Thus Ferdowsi says about the fatal end of the celestial ascent of king Kāʾus: "If king Kāʾus had persished, the ruler of the world, king Ḵosrow, would not (have come) from the king." (*Šāh-nāma,* ed. Vullers, p. 412, n. 1, not in Moscow, II, p. 154, not in Khaleghi-Motlagh, II, p. 97, but analogously also in Ṯaʿālebi, p. 167). The meaning of the seemingly banal phrase is clear: if Kāʾus had died before the birth of his future son Siāwoš, then Siāwoš's son, the model king Ḵosrow, would not have been born either. This statement goes back to a passage of the lost Avestan book *Sūdgar nask*. It reports that the god Neryōsang wanted to kill Kāʾus as punishment for his hybris, but the pre-existent protective spirit (*frawahr*) of the future king Ḵosrow forestalled it. He said: "Do not kill him, Neryōsang, increaser of the world, for if you kill this man, O Neryōsang, increaser of the world, then the severing (*wisānēnīdār*) judge of Tūrān will not be found. For of this man [Kāʾus] will be born he whose name is Siyāwaxš. Of Siyāwaxš I shall be born who am Xusraw" (*Dēnkard,* ed. Madan, pp. 816, l. 22 – 817, l. 7). That this legend goes back to the *Avesta* is confirmed by an Avestan quotation in the Middle Persian commentary on *Vidēvdād* 2 which says: "Thereupon he [Neryōsag] let him [Kāʾūs] escape; thereupon he [Kāʾūs] became mortal." (*Avesta,* ed. Darmesteter, III, 1960, p. 37.)

This example and others confirm that the Middle Persian national tradition, even if transmitted by minstrels from generation to generation, did not fail to draw on works of the religious tradition and so ultimately on the text of the complete *Avesta.* Additionally, Avestan motives may have been incorporated

into the national tradition when the *Xwadāy nāmag* was composed with the assistance of the priests.

The *Avesta* was certainly not the prime source of the Iranian epics either. Its *Yašt*s briefly allude to epic motifs, the familiarity of which they presuppose (Gershevitch, 1968, p. 23). In a few cases it may even be possible to retrace the history of a certain motif back to the common Indo-Iranian mythology. That is possibly so in the case of the lord of the world Kāʾus, whose name and fate and deeds have been compared by H. Lommel (1939, pp. 209-14) and G. Dumézil (1982, II, pp. 158-238) with Kāvya Uśanas of the *Veda*s and in the *Mahābhārata* (differently Bartholomae, 1904, col. 406; Christensen, 1932, pp. 79-81). More examples are given in Skjærvø, 1995, p. 191.

The Kayanian cycle, as sanctioned by the Avesta, was not the only subject of the national tradition. The most important non-Kayanian contribution to the national tradition was the Rostam legend. Rostam does not figure in the *Avesta,* and he came to be stigmatized as a descendent of the tyrant Ẓaḥḥāk. The Rostam saga was first the story of a local Sistanian hero (Nöldeke, 1929, pp. 9-12; Christensen, 1930, pp. 136-37; Yarshater, 1983, pp. 453-57). From there Rostam must have entered rather late into the circle of the Kayanian heros. Mani ignored him in his *Book of the Giants* (see GIANTS, BOOK OF THE), which otherwise betrays familiarity with the Iranian mythical past (Skjærvø, 1995, pp. 187-223). Rostam became a frequent proper name in the last century of Sasanian rule (Justi, 1963, p. 263). It is true that a Sogdian fragment from Central Asia contains an episode of Rostam's deeds, but the spelling of his name (rwstmy, i.e., *Rustami*) is the Middle Persian or even the New Persian form, not the expected Sogdian form of the name, (Yarshater, 1983, p. 456) and so betrays a late origin.

Another source of the national tradition was personalities and events of the Arsacid and even the Sasanian periods which were reproduced in the legendary history of the Kayanian dynasty (Nöldeke, 1920, pp. 48-49; Christensen, 1932, pp. 127-29).

Later, perhaps in post-Sasanian times, it also happened that works of the religious tradition had recourse to the national tradition. The *Bundahišn*, in its chapter on the families of the *mōbadān*, quoted the *Xwadāy nāmag* (written *xwadāyīh nāmag*, ed. B. T. Anklesaria, pp. 304-5, sec. 7). So it would be more correct to assume an interrelation of secular and religious traditions of epic material (see Gershevitch, 1968, p. 26).

Works in the Middle Persian language. The small group of texts in the Middle Persian language is free from any Islamic revision, and its works are, as a rule, older pieces of tradition than the late Sasanian edition of the *Xwadāy nāmag* and its derivatives. They are completely understandable, however, only as arranged in the framework of the post-Sasanian tradition. Most important are the *Ayādgār ī Zarērān* and the *Kārnāmag ī Ardašīr ī Pābakān*. The *Ayādgār ī Zarērān* is the typical representative of the aristocratic epic of the national tradition (see Cereti, 2001, pp. 200-205). It belongs to the Kayanian cycle. Its object is the war of king Wištāsp against Arjāsp, the ruler of the Xyōnān, the northern neighbors of Iran. It is a religious war, for Arjāsp had commanded Wištāsp to give up the Zoroastrian faith. According to the *Šāh-nāma* this happened because Zoroaster had pressed Wištāsp not to pay tribute to Arjāsp any longer (*Šāh-nāma*, ed. Khaleghi-Motlagh, V, pp. 84-85, ll. 87-90). But in spite of the religious motivation of the war, the work is totally in praise of Zarēr, the brother of Wištāsp, and his son. Zarēr plays the leading, although tragic role in the war. He falls as a victim of the witchcraft of the Xyōnān after having inflicted decisive blows on the enemy. Zoroaster does not appear at all in this epic. In his stead Jāmāsp, a pupil of Zoroaster and king Wištāsp's minister, functions as the king's clairvoyant counselor.

The *Ayādgār ī Zarērān* is by far the most beautiful piece of Middle Persian epic poetry, and it is not for nothing that it belonged to a manuscript called the "Pahlavi Šāh-nāmak" (Geiger, 1890, p. 43). It is rich in poetical metaphors and concise, vivid descriptions of events and moods. In this respect it is even preferable to the longer matching parts in the *Šāh-nāma* which Ferdowsi took over from Daqiqi. The work in its original state must have been at least partly versified and metrically stylized, even if Benveniste's efforts to reconstruct verses consisting regularly of six (and five) syllables requires too far-reaching changes to the text (1932, p. 250).

A relatively early origin, before the 6th century CE, is advocated by the observation that the northern neighbors of Iran are called Xyōnān, not Turks, as in the *Šāh-nāma* and in Ṭaʿālebi's *Ḡorar*. Besides, Wištāsp (Hystaspēs) and his brother are already the champions of a story recorded by Athēnaios (ca. CE 200), on the authority of Charēs of Mytilēnē (a contemporary of Alexander the Great), in his *Deipnosophistai,* where Zarēr bears the similar name Zariadrēs (against Avestan Zairi.vairi-) and gets involved in a romantic love affair (Athenaios, 1985, pp. 354-56). This part of the story is not completely missing in the *Šāh-nāma* but was transferred to his brother Wištāsp (*Šāh-nāma*, ed.

Khaleghi-Motlagh, V, pp. 19-24).

The fact that the *Ayādgār ī Zarērān* contains some Parthian words (Pagliaro, 1925, pp. 552-54) is no compelling argument for an origin of the work in Arsacid times (despite Benveniste, 1932, pp. 250, 291). It is also possible that it was composed under the Sasanians in an area where Parthian as a literary language had survived for some time the breakdown of Arsacid rule.

The *Kārnāmag ī Ardašīr ī Pābakān* "Book of the deeds of Ardašīr, son of Pābak" is of a markedly different character (see Cereti, 2001, pp. 192-200). It is a plain prose text in late Middle Persian, treating of events of the recent Sasanian past. It appears to be a heroic romance presented in the marketplaces rather than an epic recited at the courts, and it has some traits in common with what in German is called a *Volksbuch*. It exalts the miraculous assumption of power by Ardašīr, the founder of the Sasanian dynasty. Conventional motives are the birth of the future king in a modest social ambience and prophetic dreams predicting his coming glory. This motif is later outdone by the story of the youth of Ardašīr's grandson and second successor Ohrmazd (I), who grew up in concealment but later betrayed his royal origin by his chivalrous behavior, skillfulness, and strength, just as the young Cyrus did under the rule of Astyages (Herodotus, 1.107-24).

Another characteristic is the lack of awareness of fundamental historical facts in this text. In the Ardašīr tale the whole period between Alexander and Pābak is reduced to one generation. Sāsān, the natural father of Ardašīr, flees from Alexander, hides with Kurdish tribes and finally arrives at Pābak's court. The ensuing problem of how to derive Ardašīr from both Sāsān, the eponym of the dynasty, and from Pābak, his immediate predecessor, was evidently solved by taking recourse to the device of his mother entering into a *čagar* marriage (a similar view is expressed by Grenet, 2003, p. 30, who, however, does not envisage the radical shortening of the period from Alexander to Pābak): Pābak gives his daughter (so according to the K*ārnāmag*, but his wife according to Agathias) in marriage to Sāsān. He then adopts Sāsān's son Ardašīr.

Some motives of the Ardašīr legend are likely to have been borrowed from the ancient Kayanian tradition. The story of how Ardašīr makes his way in disguise into the fortress of the Kirm-xwadāy *Haftowād reminds one of Esfandiār's entering and conquering the "Bronze Fortress" (*Šāh-nāma*, ed. Khaleghi-Motlagh, V, pp. 259-63) and of many other legendary patterns (Yarshater 1983, p. 401).

The praise of Sasanian grandeur in Ardašīr's deeds is partly counteracted, however, by his numerous defeats, by his dependence on divine and human help and protection. Vassals like Ardašīr's general Bannāg are mentioned. A great role in Ardašīr's entourage is played by members of the clergy such as the two *hāwištān* (priestly pupils) who support his fight with their prayers and their advice. Besides, there are repeated interventions of divine powers such as the *Xwarr ī xwadāyīh* "the charisma of lordship" or the fire *Ādur Farnbāg* (in the shape of a red eagle) in favor of Ardašīr. All this attests to the strong clerical part in this work (see Henning, 1968, p. 142 = 1977, II, p. 663).

The *Kārnāmag* in its present form cannot have been composed before the 6th century, for the northern neighbors of the Iranians are called Turks (see Grenet, 2003, pp. 44-45). But it must have existed then, for it was known in a slightly different version to Agathias (530-82; Agathias, 1864, book II, 27). Many of its components are incorporated into the *Šāh-nāma* and into Ṯaʿālebi's *Ḡorar*. Ṭabari's version is less dependent on the *Kārnāmag*.

The description of Ardašir's successes and failures gives the *Kārnāmag* a rather unheroic character. But this was certainly not the author's intention. Ardašīr's deficiencies were the price for the convincing demonstration of the king's divine right.

The small treatise *Wizārišn ī čatrangud nihišn ī nēw-ardašīr* "Explanation of the game of chess and the invention of the *Nard* game" (Panaino, 1999; cf. Cereti, 2001, pp. 203-5) is not only a didactic work, but also makes use of the motif of chivalrous contest. However, the hero of the story is not a belligerent noble fighter but Wuzurg Mihr ī Buxtagān, the Wezīr of Xusraw I. His achievement is an intellectual one, the unraveling of how to play chess, to play it and win, and to outdo the Indian invention by the invention of the Nard (*Nēw-ardašīr*) game, better known as backgammon. It is a legend *ad majorem patriae gloriam*, the hero being in this case a member of the court bureaucracy. Wuzurg Mihr, it is true, shares many aspects of the ancient Aḥīqar figure (De Blois, 1990, p. 20). But these are not manifest in the tale of the *Wizārišn*. The story plays at the time of Xusraw I (6th century), and it was surely a product of the late Sasanian period.

Many, perhaps most works in praise of heroic figures, epics or romances, must have been lost, such as the story of Bahrām Čōbēn which is often mentioned and best known from Balʿami's Persian translation of Ṭabari's *History* (Nöldeke, 1879, pp. 474-78; Christensen, 1907) or works on the two Sasanian

Xusraws or on Rostam and Esfandiār, listed in Ebn al-Nadim's *Fehrest* (see Boyce, 1968, p. 60). We can only guess that they were romances rather than epics.

This is also true of the Hellenistic (Greek) love romance of *Metiokhos and Parthenopē*, imitated by ʿOnṣori in his *Vāmeq o ʿAẓrā*, which is said to have first been translated into Middle Persian and dedicated to Xusraw I (Boyce, 1968, p. 64-65, its mediating role is doubted, however, by Utas, 1995, pp. 237-39).

Gnomic and didactic literature. The main sources on gnomic (*andarz*) literature are: (1) Jamasp-Asana, 1897-1913, containing the following works, with titles given by the editor: *Andarzīhā ī pēšēnīgān* (ed. Chunakova, 1991, pp. 32-33, earlier editions p. 106), *Čīdag andarz ī pōryōtkēšān* (also called *Pand-nāmag ī Zardušt*, ed. Chunakova, 1991, pp. 33-37; earlier ed., pp. 106-7), *Andarz ī dānāgān ō mazdēsnān* (ed. Chunakova, 1991, pp. 37-39; earlier ed., pp. 109-10), *Andarz ī Xusraw ī Kawādān* (ed. Chunakova, 1991, pp. 39-40; earlier ed., pp. 110), *Andarz ī anōšag-ruwān Ādurbād ī Mahraspandān* (ed. Chunakova, 1991, pp. 41-45; earlier ed., p. 111), *Andarz ī Wehzād Farrox-Pērōz* (ed. Chunakova, 1991, pp. 46-47; earlier ed., p. 114; Tafazzoli, 1971, pp. 49-56), *Saxwan ēwcand ī Ādur-Farnbag ī Farroxzādān* (ed. Chunakova, 1991, p. 48; earlier ed., p. 115), *Wāzagīhā ī Baxt-āfrīd ud Ādurbād ī Zarduštān* (ed. Chunakova, 1991 p. 48, earlier ed., p. 116), *Ayādgār ī Wuzurg Mihr* (ed. Chunakova, 1991, pp. 49-56; earlier ed., p. 117), *Andarz ī dastwarān ō weh-dēnān* (ed. Chunakova, 1991, pp. 56-58; earlier ed., p. 120), *Panj xēm ī āsrōnān* (ed. Chunakova, 1991, p. 59; earlier ed., p. 121), *Wāzag ēwand ī Ādurbād ī Mahraspandān* (ed. Chunakova, 1991, pp. 60-63; earlier ed., p. 121), *Andarz ī Ōšnar ī dēnīg* (ed. Dhabhar, 1930; cf. De Blois, 1993, pp. 95-97). (2) *Dēnkard* Book 6, ed. Madan, 1911, pp. 473-590; ed. Shaked, 1979 (a compiled text with the initial words *Pōryōtkēšān kard [ud] dāšt wābar gōwišn ī dēn mazdēsn*, corrections following Shaked). On the subject of wisdom literature in general, see Cereti, 2001, pp. 171-90, on *andarz* poetry, pp. 181-85, with characteristic text quotations.

The main sources of wisdom literature not of *andarz* character is Jamasp-Asana's edition, which contains such works of worldly instruction and entertainment as *Šahrestānīhā ī Ērān-šahr* (see Daryaee, 2002), *Xusraw ī Kawādān ud rēdak*, *Draxt ī asūrīg*, *Ēwēnag ī nāmag nibēsišnīh*, *Dārūg ī hunsandīh,* and *sūr saxwan*. Also worth mentioning are *Xwēškārīh ī rēdakān* (ed. Junker, 1912) and *Čim ī kustīg* (ed. Junker, 1959).

Next to the heroic epic and romance the other well-attested object of belles

lettres in Sasanian Iran was wisdom literature in a broad sense. Works of wisdom literature were not just dry teaching books but presented material knowledge and religious maxims and reflections on worldly wisdom and good sense in an entertaining way. The subject matter was not action and heroic achievement, adventure and love affairs, but advice on how to behave, what to believe, and what to know, preferably in terms of a refined, aristocratic life-style.

Wisdom literature usually consists of brief texts—in the case of religious texts, containing moral and pragmatic reflections—usually of gnomic character. The most common name of pieces of wisdom literature in this strict sense is in Middle Persian *andarz* (MacKenzie, 1971, p. 41: *handarz* "advice, injunction, testament"). The Manichean Middle Persian and Parthian form of the word is ʾndrz and means "precept, command" (Boyce, 1977, p. 12), that is, one of the commandments given by Mani and often with an aspect of prohibition, renunciation, or respectful observance. In Zoroastrian parlance, however, it is the complete dictum of a prominent personality addressed to his own offspring in the hour of death, and thus a spiritual testament of obligatory force (see de Menasce, 1983, p. 1180), or a speech of a king to his courtiers on the occasion of his coronation, and thus a display of his political program. Some of the *andarz* texts were advisory speeches of high-ranking dignitaries for the benefit of the monarch and thus the only possible way to direct and, if necessary, to correct the behavior of a king. These situations may well have been the ideal *Sitz im Leben* of the refined *andarz* literature.

The role of *andarz* at court links this genre with the epic tradition, and it is not surprising that the *Šāh-nāma* contains a great number of coronation speeches, spiritual testaments, and statesmanlike admonitions.

Unlike the anonymous epics and romances, wisdom literature tends to circulate under an author's name. The author can be a famous person, a king or a high-ranking dignitary of the Zoroastrian clergy or of the court bureaucracy: Ardašīr I, Ohrmazd I, Xusraw I, the legendary sage Ōšnar, the prolific high-priest Ādurbād ī Mahraspandān (4th century), his son Zardušt and his grand-son Ādurād ī Zarduštān, the legendary minister of Xusraw I, Wuzurgmihr ī Buxtagān, a priest Baxt Āfrīd, a certain Wehzād ī Farrox Pērōz, and from the Islamic period Ādurfarnbag ī Farroxzādān (9th century). But wisdom texts were also ascribed anonymously to *dānāgān* "the wise," *pēšēnīgān* "the ancestors," or *pōryōtkēšān* "the primitive believers" (Shaked, 1985, pp. 14-15). The attestation of an author's name does not prove, however,

the late origin of what an author has to say. The topics and motives of the Sasanian wisdom literature are no less the result of a long oral development than is the epic tradition.

Sh. Shaked traced the Middle Persian *andarz* tradition back to late Avestan literature, especially the *Bariš nask* (Shaked, 1985, p. 15, with reference to de Menasce, 1958, pp. 38-39; see also Skjærvø, 1988, pp. 799-800). Ultimately, wisdom literature has its origins in the "Weisheits- und Unterweisungsliteratur" of the Ancient Near East, in Egypt and Mesopotamia in particular (Freydank; Reineke, 1978, pp. 465-66; see also Asmussen, 1971, p. 269; van Imshoot, 1969, cols. 1877-81).

That Iranian wisdom literature was inspired and stimulated by patterns from the ancient Near East is a natural assumption. The contribution of contemporary religions in Sasanian Iran to the formation of the Zoroastrian *andarz* tradition was underlined by J. P. Asmussen (1971, pp. 271-72). Another conspicuous topic is the frequent praise of the golden mean (*paymān*) between excess and deficiency which may owe some inspiration to a basic rule of Aristotles Nicomachian ethics (Shaked, 1979, p. XL; 1985, p. 14; de Menasce 1983, p. 1180).

Perhaps the best-known piece of *andarz* and, as a religious text, the most important one, attested in many versions (Kanga, 1960, pp. II-IV; cf. Zaehner, 1956, pp. 17-28) is the confession of the Zoroastrian faith, formulated as a strictly dualistic sequence of antithesises: "From the spiritual (world) I came, not in the material I came into being (*būd hēm*), created am I, not come into being (*būdag*)," etc. The preceding questions and the manner in which they are formulated remind one of similar patterns in the Manichean *Sermon on the Soul* and in Clement of Alexandria's *Extracts of Theodotus* (Sundermann, 1991, pp. 20-21).

Entertaining literature which does not belong to the *andarz* genre but treats of any other subject of worldly life and culture may best be understood as wisdom literature in an unspecified sense. The *Dādistān ī mēnōg ī xrad* "Decisions of the Spirit of Wisdom" has perhaps most in common with the *andarz* texts. It is a kind of religious encyclopedia of a decidedly didactic character. But the topics are put in the framework of revelations by an otherwise unkn'own "Spirit of Wisdom" (see Tavadia 1956, pp. 98-101; Boyce, 1968, p. 54; Cereti, 2001, pp. 161-69; Tafazzoli, 1969, 1975/6, 1985/6). To be singled out are some small works which instruct and entertain by way of test

and contest, such as the *Draxt ī asūrīg* "The Babylonian tree," originally a tenson in Parthian language. The dramatis personae are a palm tree and a goat who quarrel about who is more useful for man (Tavadia, 1956, pp. 132-34; Boyce 1968, p. 55). The poem follows an old Mesopotamian pattern (Asmussen, 1970, pp. 23-25; Brunner, 1980). More dramatic is the riddle contest of the sorcerer Axt and a bright Zoroastrian boy in *Mādayān ī Jōišt ī Friyān* "The book on Jōišt ī Friyān" (Boyce, 1968, pp. 54-55; Weinreich, 1992, pp. 44-101; cf. Cereti, 2001, pp. 187-88). *Xusraw ī Kawādān ud rēdak* "Xusraw the son of Kawād and the page boy" is also constructed as a test of expert knowledge. The boy, who applies for service at the king's court, has to answer Xusraw's questions successfully, which proves him to be a connoisseur of the refined aristocratic life-style (Tavadia, 1956, pp. 134-35; Boyce, 1968, pp. 63-64; Monchi-zadeh, 1982, pp. 47-91, cf. Cereti, 2001, pp. 178-80). On further works of a related genre, see Tavadia, 1956, pp. 102, 106, 108-10, 139, 141; Boyce, 1968, pp. 62-64.

Political treatises such as the *Letter of Tansar* (*Tansar-nāma*) which survive only in Arabic and New Persian translations belong to this literary category in a loose sense (Boyce, 1968, pp. 60-61; Grignaschi, 1966; Sundermann, 1976).

Most pieces of the wisdom literature are written in prose. But even so they are not without stylistic embellishments, such as *parallelismus membrorum* (parallel phrase/sentence structures), alliteration, rhyme, assonance, pairs of words, opposing terms, etc. (Fichtner, 1965, pp. 55-70; Tafazzoli, 1971, p. 49). There are, however, also short poetic texts. They consist of verses with a caesura, a quasi-regular sequence of stresses, and a number of syllables with limited variation (Shaked, 1970, pp. 397-401; Tafazzoli, 1971, pp. 45-60, esp. p. 48, n. 1), sometimes (under New Persian influence?) with final and occasionally continuous rhyme. Examples, taken from the wisdom literature, are: *Draxt ī asūrīg* (Henning, 1950, pp. 641-45 = 1977 II, pp. 349-53; see also Benveniste, 1930, pp. 193-225), an *andarz* text without title (Henning, 1950, pp. 647-648 = 1977 II, pp. 355-356), and other texts (Shaked, 1970, pp. 397-401; Tafazzoli 1971, p. 58). See also POETRY iv. THE POETICS OF MIDDLE PERSIAN.

Wisdom literature kept its place no less in the post-Sasanian Arabic and Persian *adab* works of Islamic authors (de Menasce, 1983, pp. 1182-83), whenever a concern with worldly matters and a mildly religious outlook facilitated its adaptation (Shaked, 1985, p. 15). But it was certainly also its artistic refinement which secured its survival after the breakdown of the Sasanian empire.

Courtly lyrics. The time of Xusraw II has not only left a notorious memory of dramatic, exhausting military campaigns, it has also been praised as the acme of refined Sasanian courtly culture. Even if those reports are idealized and exaggerated, they were certainly not mere inventions and not without a correspondence in real life. A number of celebrated court poets and singers like Sarkaš (*recte* Sargīs? see Boyce, 1957, pp. 23-24) and the most famous Bārbad (see on him Tafazzoli, 1988, pp. 757-58), who emulated each other for the king's favor, are said to have composed an enormous amount of songs and melodies (Boyce, 1957, p. 24). Unfortunately their attestation is nil or sparse at best, post-Sasanian, imprecise, and more often than not problematic (see the survey in Klíma, 1968, pp. 56-57). But it seems possible that at least one specimen of courtly poetry is preserved in the *Tārīḵ-e Sīstān*, in New Persian rendering, as an alleged "hymn of the devotees of the sacred fire" of Karkūya (Bosworth, 1968, p. 5) which rather appears to be a song in praise of wine and love and merrymaking addressed to a king (see *OLZ* 66, 1971, col. 488).

Parables, fairy tales. Works of this kind were, so far as we can judge, written in simple prose like many of the *andarz* texts, but they had a story to tell. They materialized in written form in the last centuries of the Sasanian period. They were rooted in the time-honored tradition of the storytellers and—to a remarkable extent—in translations from the neighboring literatures of India. They have almost completely disappeared as a genre of Middle Persian literature, perhaps because their prestige was moderate and less than that of all the other kinds of literature.

Maṣʿūdi and Ebn al-Nadim knew of a Middle Persian collection of tales, *Hazār afsānag* "Thousand tales," the title of which reminds one of the famous *Arabian Nights* (lit. "Thousand and one Nights"), but a dependence of the Arabian on the Middle Persian collection of tales is doubtful (Klíma, p. 54; Boyce, 1968, p. 65).

It is easier to get an idea of what the borrowings from other languages were. Borrowings from the Indian and the Buddhist literatures take prime of place. Burzōē is supposed to have translated the parable collection of the *Pañcatantra* under the title of **Kalīlag ud Dimnag* (Boyce, 1968, p. 65). His editorial work is disputed, but has recently been defended by de Blois (1990, esp. pp. 58-65). Two Indian fables, incorporated into the *Letter of Tansar*, were identified by Mary Boyce (1955, pp. 50-58). The legend of the Buddha's youth and enlightenment, known in the Islamic and the Christian world as Barlaam and Josaphat, etc. was demonstrably known to the Manicheans, but probably

familiar also among the Zoroastrians (Klíma, 1968, pp. 57-58; Sundermann, 1992, pp. 334-38). On further possible borrowings from the Indian side, see Boyce, 1968, p. 65.

Non-Zoroastrian belles-lettres. It is only the Manichean literature in Middle Persian and Parthian languages which has produced a considerable amount of literature that can be regarded as entertaining in content and pleasant in form, namely its great wealth of parable texts (see the bibliographical notes in the introduction). Such tales play only a modest role in the Zoroastrian literature (Shaked, 1985, p. 12). They were familiar to the Manicheans as part of the Christian gospel heritage, which inspired the Manichean literature, among other things, to many tree metaphors (Arnold-Döben, 1978, pp. 7-40). In its completely developed state the Manichean parable literature (allegories included) appears to have been influenced by such Buddhist models as *Avadāna* and *Jātaka* collections (Sundermann, 1973, p. 5). The Manicheans developed collections of parables modeled on these in their Eastern literatures, and a fragment of a Sogdian *Parable book* (ʾz-ʾntnʾmy) is preserved (Sundermann, 1985).

The Manichean parables were surely produced in order to entertain the lay people and the elect. Their authors did this in the best possible way, for they were fanciful storytellers, their tales were well invented, pointed, and, if necessary, translated in a masterly manner into other languages. In the Manichean view the legend of the life of the Buddha was also a parable which they retold and possibly spread to the west (Asmussen, 1966, pp. 14-19).

But to tell tales and entertain people was no end in itself for the Manichean authors. Each parable had a catechetical objective. It was designed to illustrate the Manichean world- view and to admonish the lay people to give alms and the perfect ones to lead an impeccable life. So each story is followed by an *epimythion* which explains the symbolic meaning of events and persons.

Some of the Manichean Bēma hymns gave room for a sublime feeling for the beauty of nature, such as, in Middle Persian language, M 554 (Klimkeit, 1993, p. 126).

There was also at least one Manichean *andarz* text, coined evidently on the pattern of similar Zoroastrian specimens (Sundermann, 1976, pp. 185-88).

Oral poetry, written literature. The predominance of the oral poetical tradition

in pre-Islamic Iran is well known. It was only in the Sasanian period and mainly in the last two centuries of this period, that priests and scholars began to apply the Pahlavi script in its then current form to poetical works (Boyce, 1968, p. 32). Up to then and certainly for a long time after, any literary product was transmitted orally from generation to generation, and learnt by heart (*warm kard*). The long oral tradition has left its traces in the written texts which have come down to us. They are, as a rule, characterized by "anonymity, community of style, conservatism in matter and free plagiarism" (Boyce, 1968, p. 32). Historical events can be simplified, deformed, or disregarded; didactic material is arranged, if possible, in mnemotechnic series and semantic groups, repetitive, formulaic phrases abound.

The conservation of oral traditions in written form hardly meant progress. The written texts faithfully preserve, at best, what their sources said. But their sources are sometimes misrepresented or misunderstood, and the texts as they have come down to us are full of mistakes. The metrical form of an epic must be reconstructed, and it was never possible to represent its melodious part in writing (Boyce, 1968, p. 55). There is hardly any trace of individual features in Middle Persian literature before the time of Islam. Burzōē's famous autobiographical preface to his *Pañcatantra* translation (6th century) is certainly exceptional.

The social aspect of entertaining literature. The "place in life" of the heroic epic was, as elsewhere, the "triangle" of "singer, patron and the public" (Hatto 1991, p. 8). The heroic epic glorifies the outstanding representatives of the aristocracy, it holds the clergy in high esteem, and it submits loyally to the royal power. The presence and the not always harmonious synthesis of those three principles caused Sh. Shahbazi to assume three versions of the *Xwadāy nāmag*, a priestly, a royal, and a heroic, that is, aristocratic one (Shahbazi, 1990, pp. 215-18) which would be more convincing if these tendencies were mutually exclusive. The *andarz* texts presuppose and accept the established social order and the distribution of the fortunes. But the aim of the creators of entertaining literature was certainly not the ideological support of the ruling class, even if this was its effect (see Yarshater, 1983, pp. 393-401), it was first of all entertainment and diversion. It was addressed to the members of the ruling class, and so it expressed their views and values. Heroic poems were surely appreciated and generously rewarded at the courts of the nobility. According to Asmussen (1971, pp. 269-270), the *andarz* works were also meant to entertain and enlighten the upper-class people. But that does not mean that

belletristic entertaining works were ignored by commoners or that there existed a kind of popular anti-literature. The long-term oral tradition of poetical works made them accessible also to the illiterate people. If the Iranian public was so fond of the beauty of the poetic word as is still true in our day, then bards and storytellers had their listeners among all the social strata.

The preservers and creators of the epic and in a broader sense of the narrative poetry were minstrels and storytellers. The religious literature was the domain of priests. Some real or fictive authors of *andarz* texts are mentioned. They are kings, members of the court bureaucracy ("scribes"), and priests. This may be taken as a realistic reflection of the authorship of such works. The part of the clergy in the composition and collection of works of the secular literature has justly been underlined by Mary Boyce (1968, pp. 63-64). Seeing that priests were also the scholars of their time and were, as judges and governors, involved in the service of the state, they merged with the group of the *dibīrān*, the "scribes" or "secretaries."

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