



# EDUCATION II. IN THE PARTHIAN AND SASANIAN PERIODS

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No concrete evidence on education in Parthian times has survived. It may be postulated, however, that it was similar to education in the Sasanian period. Information about the latter period is confined mainly to education of princes, the nobility, the clergy, and administrative secretaries (*dabīrs*). Most peasants were illiterate, but most urban merchants were probably acquainted at least with writing and calculation (Christensen, *Iran Sass.*, p. 416).

The required education for a child of a noble or an upper-class family is described in the Pahlavi treatise *Xusrāw ud Rēdag* (*Pahlavi Texts*, ed. Jamasp-Asana, pp. 27-38): writing, religious instruction, physical education, and training in courtly arts. A noble child would begin attending school (*frhangestān*) at the “proper age,” between five and seven years (*Wizīrkard*, p. 177; cf. Ṭabarī, I, pp. 815, 855: Ardašīr at seven years, Bahrām V at five years) and would have completed general training and religious studies by the age of fifteen years (*Andarz ī Pōryōtkēšān*, par. 1; *Pahlavi Texts*, ed. Jamasp-Asana, p. 41). At school he would learn to write and would memorize the *yašts*, *Hādōxt*,



*Bayān Yasn*, and *Vidēvdād*, the same training provided for a future *hērbēd* (religious teacher). In addition, he would listen to the Zand, the Pahlavi translation of the Avesta. Astrology was also part of the curriculum (*Xusraw ud Rēdag*, pars. 8-10, 14). The education of a certain Mihrām-Gušnasp, son of a noble Sasanian family who later converted to Christianity and was martyred, was similar. He was said to have been initiated into Middle Persian literature and the Zoroastrian religion at an early age. He could recite the *yašts* and hold the *barsom* at the age of seven years (Hoffmann, p. 94; Christensen, *Iran Sass.*, pp. 413-14). According to Abū Maṣṣūr Ṭaʿālebī (*Ĝorar*, p. 712), Šīrōya (later Kavad II, r. 628 C.E.) read *Kalīla wa Demna* at school.

The account of the education of *Dārāb* given in the *Šāh-nāma* (Moscow, VI, pp. 359-60, vv. 93-103; cf. Ṭaʿālebī, *Ĝorar*, p. 394; cf. *Xusraw ud Rēdag*, pars. 11-12) probably reflects Sasanian norms: He first learned the Avesta and Zand and was then trained in riding, archery, polo, and the military arts. It was customary to entrust the education of a prince, especially a crown prince, to a tutor, in some instances far from the court. For example, at the end of the Arsacid period *Bābak* sent *Ardašīr* (224-40) at the age of seven years to the *argbed* *Tīrī*, who was probably commander of the fortress of *Dārābgerd* (see *DĀRĀB ii*), to be educated (Ṭabarī, I, p. 815; Balʿamī, ed. Bahār, p. 876). Writing (*dibīrīth*), riding (*aswārīth*), and other skills were parts of his education (*Kār-nāmag*, ed. Antia, chap. II, p. 5 par. 4). *Ardašīr* himself, while at the court of the last Arsacid king, *Ardavān* (see *ARTABANUS*), had trained princes in horsemanship and hunting (Ṭaʿālebī, *Ĝorar*, p. 475). *Bahrām V* (*Bahrām Gōr*; 421-39), whose education was said to have been entrusted to *Monḍer*, Arab ruler of *Ḥīra* in Mesopotamia, was instructed by various tutors (*moʿaddeb*) in writing, archery, riding, and law. His general education is reported to have finished at the age of twelve years, after which he continued training in archery and riding until he attained mastery (Ṭabarī, I, pp. 855-57; Meskawayh, pp. 78-79; *Dīnavarī*, ed. Guirgass, p. 53; Ṭaʿālebī, *Ĝorar*, p. 541; *Šāh-nāma*, Moscow, VII, pp. 270-71; Balʿamī, ed. Bahār, pp. 929-30).

A noble education also involved learning to play musical instruments and sing, games like chess and backgammon, and general information about wines, flowers, women, and riding animals (*Xusraw ud Rēdag*, pars. 13, 15, 57-58, 62-63, 66, 69-93, 96, 99-100). When *Ardašīr* was relegated by *Ardavān* to service in the royal stable, he reportedly amused himself by playing the lute (*ṭanbūr*) and singing (*srōd-wāzīg*; *Kār-nāmag*, ed. Antia, chap. 3, p. 11 par. 2; cf. *Šāh-nāma*, ed. Khaleghi, II, p. 30, VI, p. 178, about *Rostam* and *Esfandīār*



respectively).

Ferdowsī's description of the education of Prince Sīāvaš by Rostam in Zābol provides a model of princely education in Sasanian and probably Parthian times as well. The prince was not only trained in horsemanship, archery, hunting, and the arts of war but also learned social etiquette, ceremonial rites, conduct on festive occasions, and delivery of orations. The results of his education were later apparent in the skills in archery, polo, and hunting that he exhibited when he lived at the court of *Afrāsīāb* (*Šāh-nāma*, ed. Khaleghi, II, pp. 207, 289-94).

There is some evidence that in the Sasanian period women attended school, at least for general religious studies, though probably in relatively small numbers (Kotwal and Kreyenbroek, pp. 18, 38, 43); the main part of their training, however, consisted of domestic skills learned at home (*Dēnkard*, ed. Madan, I, p. 935; Christensen, *Iran Sass.*, p. 418). There is one piece of evidence suggesting that some women were well versed in Sasanian civil law (Bartholomae, p. 35; Christensen, *Iran Sass.*, p. 418).

Three terms for “school” are attested in Pahlavi books: *frahangestān*, lit., “place of education” (*Xusraw ud Rēdag*, par. 8; *Kār-nāmag*, ed. Antia, chap. 2, p. 8 par. 21); *dibīrestān*, probably a school for training scribes and secretaries (*Andarz ī Ādurbād*, pars. 58, 129, in *Pahlavi Texts*, ed. Jamasp-Asana, pp. 63, 69; *Xwēškārīh ī Rēdagān*, pars. 1, 3, 5, 23, in Junker, pp. 15, 16, 20; *Sad dar naṭr*, chap. 51, p. 37); and *hērbedestān*, evidently a school for religious studies (*Andarz ī Pōryōtkēšān*, par. 8, in *Pahlavi Texts*, ed. Jamasp-Asana, p. 43; *Andarz ō kōdakān*, par. 25, in Junker, p. 20). The general term for “teacher” was *hammōzgār*, for “religious teacher” *hērbed*, and for “instructor” *frahangbed* (*Dēnkard*, ed. Madan, pp. 274, 757; cf. Ṭabarī, I, p. 1063: *mo'addeb al-asāwera* “instructor of horsemen”).

The sources provide scanty information on educational methods. In two Pahlavi treatises (*Xwēškārīh ī Rēdagān* and *Andarz ō kōdakān*) that have survived in Pāzand, the duties of boys at school, at home, and on the way from home to school are described (Junker, pp. 15-21). Physical punishment was administered at school (cf. *Zādspram*, chap. 27, p. 97 par. 8; *Pahlavi Texts*, ed. Jamasp-Asana, p. 130, par. 9, where beating with a very long stick is mentioned).



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