



HERZFELD, ERNST V. HERZFELD AND THE HISTORY OF ANCIENT IRAN

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Herzfeld's classical education, giving him familiarity with Greek and Latin literature, and his training in Oriental philology as well as in archaeology and architectural techniques proved of great benefit in his study of pre-Islamic Iranian history and culture. Almost all his works on these subjects are marked by the following characteristics: (1) an interest not only in questions of detail, but also in larger contexts; his writings often surmounted the limits of discipline and periods; (2) a distinctly less marked "orientalism" in his works in comparison with those of some predecessors and contemporaries (cf. Briant); (3) a comprehensive concept of sources; together with the literary tradition of various provenances, these included archeological, epigraphic, and numismatic findings; he also attributed proper importance to indigenous accounts; (4) the variety of objects investigated; (5) familiarity with the methods of various scientific disciplines; (6) knowledge of historical geography and topography gained by his own experience; (7) interest in "keeping alive" the pre-Islamic cultures of Iran (e.g., exploring the genesis of Islamic art; use of reports by diplomats and travelers of the early modern age).



Two qualities and one circumstance limited Herzfeld's horizon: (1) his inclination towards restlessness and apodictic verdicts; (2) his not always simple character, which made it difficult to work with others; (3) the publication of much important evidence only at the end of his life and after his death (such as the Persepolis Treasury Tablets, Persepolis Fortification Tablets, or the inscription of the deeds of Shabuhr I [see below]). The fact that Herzfeld, a generalist with a predilection for archeological, philological, and historical-geographic questions, did not find his way to a historiographic synthesis of pre-Islamic Iranian history can hardly be held against him.

On Achaemenid history and culture. Herzfeld contributed to advances in knowledge of the Achaemenids in four main areas. (1) Archeological investigation of Achaemenid period ruins in Iran, especially those of Pasargadae and Persepolis. See in detail above, parts ii. and iii. (2) Study of the Old Persian inscriptions. The publications (1938a; cf. also 1932, 1937), which were in part owing to the work of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago onsite, are still interesting, at least from the point of view of historical research. (3) Historical geography of Iran. In Herzfeld's historical-geographical studies (published posthumously, 1968), the articles "The Satrapy List of Darius" (pp. 288-97), "The Satrapies of the Persian Empire" (pp. 298-349) and "Determination of the Sculptured Figures in Persepolis" (pp. 350-65) deal with this period. Though in some respects outdated, they have provided useful ideas for later research (e.g., by G. Walser and P. Calmeyer). (4) The life of Zoroaster and the context of his message. Here one particularly remembers Herzfeld's attempt to identify Vištāspa (Gk. Hystaspes), the father of Darius I, with Kavi Vištāspa, Zoroaster's royal patron in the Gāthās of the Avesta. In a series of writings (1929-30c-d; 1930a-c; 1933) leading up to his culminating work (1947), he made a detailed criticism of the thesis of H. S. Nyberg (q.v.) that Zoroaster was an early East Iranian shaman. Herzfeld argued at great length his own belief that Zoroaster was a member of the Median and Achaemenid court and had lived in the full light of history in western Iran. Although this view proved untenable and soon was rejected (see GOŠTĀSP), recent research shows that some of Herzfeld's individual observations are still being discussed (e.g., Gnoli, 2000).

Parthian and Sasanian history and culture. On this subject, too, Herzfeld made great contributions (see Wiesehöfer). He discovered the Sasanian rock reliefs of Guyom (1926, p. 250) and Sar Mašhad. For the first time (Sarre and Herzfeld, 1910; Herzfeld, 1928), he studied these forms of historical evidence



comprehensively and with detailed analysis attributed them to certain Sasanian kings on the basis of the types of crowns shown on the coins. It was Herzfeld who made the first serious attempt to designate Sasanian mints (1938b), and he was also aware of the importance of seals and bullae for a reconstruction of the administration of that period (1924, pp. 74-82; 1938b). He described numerous known monuments of the Sasanian period (e.g., the palaces of Fīru-zābād (1926, p. 253; 1935, pp. 90 ff.; 1941, pp. 314 ff.), Qaṣr-e Šīrin (1907; 1935, p. 88), and Ctesiphon (1920; 1935, pp. 93-95). He reconstructed the tower of Paikuli, edited and discussed the bilingual inscription found there, and attributed both to King Narseh (1914; 1924; cf. Skjærvø and above, part iv.), and excavated and published the famous ruins at Kuh-e K̄āja (1926, pp. 270 ff.; 1935, pp. 58 ff.; 1941, pp. 291 ff.; cf. Kawami).

A comprehensive assessment of Sasanian history and culture can be found in Herzfeld's *Archaeological History of Iran* (1935) and *Iran in the Ancient East* (1941). In his opinion, the Sasanian period of Iranian art is to be understood as a "reaction of the Oriental mind against Hellenism" (1935, p. 79), a Hellenism (q.v.) which was never truly understood in Iran and the influence of which is described by Herzfeld as "aggressive" (1935, p. 99) and "destructive" (1935, p. 75). Both the history of Sasanian art and the political history of Iran under the Sasanids are viewed as in a constant process of decline: The powerful and religiously tolerant kings of the 3rd century were followed by the orthodox Zarathustrian Shabuhr II, whose intolerance paralyzed all intellectual life (1935, p. 100). In the end, as is identifiable in the "naïve" and "senile" art of Ṭāq-e Bostān and in the rather unassuming late Sasanian literature, there was "le roi qui s'amuse" (1941, p. 338; cf. 1938c). Just as Sasanian art owed its continuance merely to the fact that the Arabs possessed no superior civilization, so the Sasanian view of Iranian history merely came down to us because the Iranians conceived the world of Iranian epics and legends as historical facts (1934, p. 109).

In the chapter "The Early History of the Sasanian Empire" in his *Paikuli* monograph (1924), Herzfeld presented a reconstruction of the early Sasanian period, covering eight generations (1924, p. 51) and many historical events. He began by comparing the late Sasanian-Islamic tradition of Ṭabari with the legendary Iranian tradition (the *Kārnāmag*); these he compared with the numismatic and epigraphic tradition and so tried to define, on the one hand, the genealogy and, on the other, the eastern policy of the early Sasanians. In so doing, he followed the *Kārnāmag* account "that Ardashir (I) was the Arsacid



king's son-in-law and held a high office at the court" (1924, p. 40). About eastern Iran he assumed that "Sijistan, Makuran, and Turan, and . . . the whole country to the north of the Hindukush" under Ardashir I and "the whole of Sakastan" under Vahrām II (in the fratricidal war against Hormizd [see [BAHRĀM ii.](#)]; 1924, pp. 39 ff.) had become Sasanian possessions. In the clash between Vahrām III and Narseh, however, "the Indian parts of Sakastan" were again lost (1924, p. 43).

Herzfeld must have been quite disappointed by the fact that it was not he himself, but his successor in Persepolis, Erich F. Schmidt, who conceived the glorious idea to dig up the soil around the so-called Ka'ba-ye Zardošt and so discovered the account of the deeds of Shabuhr I, which indeed became the most important source of our knowledge about the early Sasanian period (Huysse, 1999). It is regrettable that in the last years of his life Herzfeld did not feel in a position to reconsider his views about precisely this period in the light of that source.

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