



MASUDI I. SOURCES

I. SOURCES.

Mas'udi considers the Persians to be the best sources for their own history and declares that he has based himself on "those books that they consider correct and well-known" (*al-kotob al-ṣaḥīḥa al-mašhūra 'endahom; Tanbih*, pp. 105, 110). In the preface of the *Moruj*, he lists many of the books he used (*Moruj* I, secs. 8-15). But his sources for pre-Islamic Persian history are much broader than these bibliographies suggest. They include A) the Avesta and its commentaries; B) historical and administrative texts translated into Arabic from Middle Persian; C) speeches and letters cited in Arabic without reference to sources; D) Arabic works by named authors; E) informants; and F) visits to sites.

A. The Avesta and its commentaries. Mas'udi describes the Avesta (*al-Bastāh*, in the *Moruj* I, sec. 542.; *al-Abastā*, in the *Tanbih*, pp. 91-92) as a book dictated, according to the Magians, by the Lord (*al-Rabb*) to the prophet Zoroaster (*Zarādošt* b. *Esbitamān*). It consisted of 21 chapters of 200 pages each and filled 12,000 bull hides (*jeld ṭawr*). It was written in gold in a script consisting of sixty characters invented by Zoroaster, called *din dabira* "the writing of religion" (*ketābat al-din*). The work contained descriptions of the afterlife, "commands and prohibitions, and other laws and rituals." The Persians no longer understand the ancient language (*al-fāresiya al-ulā* or *al-fahlawiya*) of the text and so "some of the chapters have been translated for them into this Persian" (*hādīh al-fāresiya*, meaning the contemporary language). The Persians recite those parts, which include the *Aštād*, the *Jetarašt* (which describes the



beginning and end of the world), the Bānyast, and the Hādukt (which contains admonitions and exhortations; cf. HĀDŌXT NASK), in their prayers (*Tanbih*, pp. 91-92).

The Avesta was translated into Arabic with the title al-Abastāq, although the common people call it *al-zamzama*, “muttering” (on the history of the text see, II.A., below). The commentaries on the Avesta include the Zand, written by Zoroaster himself; the Bāzand/Pāzand, a commentary on the Zand, also by Zoroaster; and a commentary on the Pāzand, called the Yārda, written by the scholars. Mas'udi does not quote from any of these works in the *Moruj* or the *Tanbih*, but claims to have discussed Zoroastrian beliefs and practices in detail in his other books (*Moruj* I, secs. 547-49; *Tanbih*, pp. 91-93).

B. Historical and administrative texts translated into Arabic from Middle Persian. Mas'udi refers to these works as “books of royal biography, from the Persians” (*kotob siar al-moluk men al-a'ajem*; *Moruj* IV, sec. 2339).

1. *Ketāb al-baykār*, translated by Ebn al-Moqaffa', translator of *Kalila wa Demna*, containing the deeds of Esfandiār, including his construction of a fortress in the Caucasus (*Moruj* I, secs. 163, 480). Mas'udi translates *baykār* as “exertion” (*ejhād*), explaining that it refers to the wars between the Persian and Turkish kings (*Tanbih*, p. 94).

2. *Ketāb al-Sakisarān*, also translated by Ebn al-Moqaffa', containing the stories of Siāvaks (Siāvaksš), Esfandiār, Rostam, Bahman, “and other wonders and events related of the ancient Persians” (*men 'ajā'eb al-fors al-ulā wa aḵbārehā*). He adds: “The Persians revere this book, because it contains reports of their ancestors and accounts of their kings” (*men kabār aslāfehem wa siar molukehem*; *Moruj* I, sec. 541; cf. sec. 543).

3. *Ketāb al-kārnāmaj*, (i.e., *Kār-nāmag i Ardašir*) credited to the Sasanian Ardašir I, “containing reports about him, the wars he fought, his travels, and his conduct” (*Moruj* I, sec. 586).

4. A work devoted to the career of Bahrām Jubin (Čöbin), the chief Sasanian army commander, including “the strategems he employed in the land of the Turks after he traveled there, as well as his rescue of the daughter of the Turkish king from the Sem', an animal resembling a large goat, which had carried her off” (*Moruj* I, sec. 644).

5. The Arabic translation of a book from the archives of the Persian kings,



translated from Persian for the Omayyad caliph Hešām b. 'Abd-al-Malek in 113/731 and preserved by “a Persian of noble family” who showed it to Mas'udi during the latter's visit to Ešṭaḡr in 303/915-16. It contained information about “the kings, the monuments, and the statecraft” of the Sasanians “not found in any other book of the Persians” as well as portraits of the rulers (*Tanbih*, pp. 106-7; see also below, VI.D).

6. *Ḳodāy-nāmāh*. This work, well known from other sources as a history of the ancient Persians, is mentioned once by Mas'udi, who remarks that the book translated for Hešām contained information not to be found in the *Ḳodāy-nāma* (*Tanbih*, p. 106).

7. The *Ā'in-nāmāh*, whose title Mas'udi translates as the book of protocol (*Ketāb al-rosūm*). It contains “thousands of pages” and “can hardly be found in its entirety except among the *mobaḍs* and other leaders” (*Tanbih*, p. 104). It includes:

7a. The *Kah-nāmāh* or *Keh-nāmāh*, a book “containing the ranks or grades (*marāteb*) of the Persian kingdom, which are 600 in number” (*Tanbih*, p. 104).

C. Speeches and letters cited in Arabic without reference to sources. Mas'udi claims to have had access to the biographies, correspondence, memoranda, accession speeches, and testamentary dispositions of all the Sasanian kings (*Moruj* I, sec. 661), but only the following are cited or mentioned by name in his surviving works. These items may have circulated as individual works, or as citations in the items listed in I.B. above or I.D. below.

1. A speech by Kayumart ([Gayōmart](#); *Moruj* I, sec. 532).
2. The speeches of Ardašir son of Bābak (*Moruj* I, secs. 577, 579-80).
3. Ardašir's testamentary disposition to his son Sābur (Šāpur; *Moruj* I, secs. 584, 586).
4. A letter from Ardašir to his scribes (*kottāb*), men of religion (*foqahā'*), cavalrymen (*asāwera*), and farmers (*harratun*; *Moruj* I, sec. 587).
5. Letters from Ardašir to one of his governors (*'ommāl*; *Moruj* I, secs. 588, 591).
6. A letter by Tansar, “the *mobaḍ* of Ardašir, and a propagandist for him” (*Tanbih*, pp. 99, where the name appears as Tanšar). Mas'udi mentions other



letters by Tansar “on royal and religious policy,” defending certain innovations introduced by Ardašir, but not citing them (*Tanbih*, p. 100). This letter is preserved in a Persian translation.

7. A letter from the Roman emperor to Šābur (Šāpur), the son of Ardašir, and the latter’s reply (*Moruj* I, sec.590).

8. A letter from Šāpur to one of his governors (*Moruj* I, sec. 591).

9. Šāpur’s testamentary disposition to his son Hormoz (*Moruj* I, sec.592).

10. A letter from Hormoz, son of Šāpur, to one of his governors (*Moruj* I, sec.593).

11. A fable about Bahrām b. Bahrām and a *mobad* who claims to understand the language of owls (*Moruj* I, secs. 596-99).

12. A dialogue between Yazdegerd b. Bahrām and a sage (*Moruj* I, sec.616).

13. Letters from the kings of China, India, and Tibet to Anušervān, son of Qobād (*Moruj* I, secs. 622-24).

14. Sayings attributed to Anušervān (*Moruj* I, secs. 629-31).

15. Speeches by Bozorjmehr ([Bozorgmehr.](#); *Moruj* I, secs. 628, 630, 645; indirect citation in IV, sec. 2848).

16. A speech by Abarviz (Kosrow II Parviz; *Moruj* I, sec. 652).

17. An anecdote about a courtier who paid Širawayh (Šērōya), son of Kosrow Parviz, such rapt attention that he fell off his mount into a river (*Moruj* IV, sec. 2339).

D. Arabic works by named authors. These works doubtless contained much translated material, but were compiled by named authors who lived during the Islamic period.

1. Extant works. In the bibliographic introduction to the *Moruj*, Mas’udi refers to the works of Ya’qubi, Balāḍori, Dinavari, Ebn Qotaybah, and Ṭabari, which are still extant, and from all of which he may have taken material on the Persians. His bibliography of works on geography includes Ebn Korradābeh’s *al-Masalek wa’l-mamālek* (*Tanbih*, p. 74). His discussion of Persian music



(*Moruj* V, secs. 3213-26) derives from the same author's now partially preserved *al-Lahw wa'l-malāhi*.

2. Lost works by known authors.

a. "A large work on history" by Ebn Korradābeh (d. between 272/885 and 300/912) containing "accounts of the Iranian and other nations (*al-a'jem wa-ḡayrehā men al-omam*), and their kings" (*Moruj* I, sec. 9).

b. Statements by Hešām b. Moḡammad Kalbi (d. 204/819) on Persian genealogies (*Moruj* I, secs. 558, 563).

c. "A history of the Persians, describing the generations of their kings, ancient and modern; reports about them, their orations, and the filiation of their genealogies; descriptions of the cities they built, the regions they settled, and the canals they dug; the noble families among them and the prominent local notables (*šahāreja*) associated with each of them" (*Moruj* I, sec. 560), composed by the philologist and genealogist Abu 'Obayda Ma'mar b. Moḡannā (d. 209/824) on the basis of information supplied by one 'Omar, "a man so famous for his knowledge of Fārs and its kings that he was given the nickname 'Omar Kesrā," (the 'Omar of Chosroes; *Moruj* I, sec. 536). Of this 'Omar Kesrā nothing further is known (Shboul, p. 104).

d. A work on geography by Aḡmad b. Ṭayyeb Saraḡsi (d. 286/899), mentioned in connection with the geography of Iran (*Tanbih*, p. 75).

e. *al-Nawāḡi wa'l-āfāq*, a work on geography by Moḡammad b. Aḡmad b. Najm b. Abi 'Awn (9th cen.), mentioned in connection with the geography of Iran (*Tanbih*, p. 75).

f. The *Aḡbār Baḡdād* of Ebn Abi Ṭāher Ṭayfur (d. 280/893), of which only a portion survives; Mas'udi cites a now-lost section on the Persian origin of the name Baghdad (*Tanbih*, p. 360).

3. Lost works by otherwise unknown authors.

a. A work on pre-Islamic and Islamic history by one Ebn Oḡt 'Isā b. Farroḡān-šāh, from which he may have taken material on the Persians (*Moruj* I, sec. 10).

b. A work by Dāwud b. Jarrāḡ "containing many accounts of the Persians and other nations" (*Moruj* I, sec. 10).



c. A work on geography by Abu 'Abd-Allāh Moḥammad b. Aḥmad Jayhāni, mentioned in connection with the geography of Iran (*Tanbih*, p. 75).

E. Informants. In addition to written sources, Mas'udi often alludes to testimony by living informants. He reports that the Persians memorize their genealogies, by which he means not only names but also stories “from one generation to another, the young [learning] from the old,” adding that informants from different regions disagree with one another (*Moruj* I, sec. 530). Discussing the chronology of the “factional kings” (*moluk al-ṭawā'ef*), that is, the successors of Alexander, he declares that, although the written sources disagree, he has obtained a reliable account from Persian scholars (*'olamā' al-fors*). These scholars pay particular attention to such matters because chronology (*tawāriḳ*) for the Persians is not merely a matter of words (*qawl*), as it is for others, but rather the basis of their practice (*'amal*; *Moruj* I, sec. 562; the meaning of this passage is obscure). To learn how many years really elapsed between Alexander and Ardašir I, a figure deliberately misrepresented in the chronicles, Mas'udi questioned “*mowbaḍs*, *herbaḍs*, and other learned and knowledgeable persons ... in Fars, Kerman, and elsewhere in the Iranian territories” (*Tanbih*, p. 97). At the conclusion of his account of Sasanian history, he reports that the descendants of the Persian kings and nobles are still to be found in Iraq, “studying their genealogies and memorizing the accounts of [their ancestors'] deeds, as the Arabs do with *Qaḥṭān* and *Nezār*,” and that his account is the one generally accepted by experts in the field (*Moruj* I, sec.662). On several other occasions he prefaces an observation with the phrase “the Persians say,” implying that his information comes from living tradents (e.g., *Tanbih*, p. 106, where the Persians say that the ancient kings of Babylon ruled on behalf of the kings of Iran). His descriptions of the festivities during *Mahragān* (*Moruj* I, sec.1287) and *Āḍār-māh* (*Moruj* II, secs.1298-99) are evidently based on firsthand observation.

F. Travel. Whenever possible, Mas'udi attempted to visit the places he wrote about and to connect historical reports with sites on the ground. In Fars, he visited a site near *Eṣṭakhr*; he calls it a fire temple, but it is evidently *Persepolis* (*Moruj* II, sec. 1403 and VI. C.3.d. below). He also visited a fire temple in *Gōr* (the present-day *Firuzābād*; *Moruj* II, sec.1404 and VI.C.3.f. below). In Azarbaijan, he saw the remains of buildings built by the Parthians (*Ašgāniyun*), along with paintings depicting the heavens and the earth (*Tanbih*, p. 95; see further II.C. below). In *Qarmāsin* (*Kermānšāh*), a town in the region



of Dinavar, he saw rock carvings (*al-ṣowar al-'ajiba al-manquša fi'l-ṣakr*) of Kōsrow II Parviz and his famous horse, Šabdāz (Šabdiz), a sight he describes as “one of the wonders of the world” (*Moruj* I, sec. 635). In Iraq, he visited Babylon (Bābel), reportedly the capital (*dār mamlaka*) of Afridun (Ferēdun). There he saw “great ruins composed of rubble, debris, and buildings collapsed into shapes like hills.” In Ṣan'ā', a city in Yemen, he visited the ruins of Ġomdān, a castle reportedly built by Zāḥḥāk (*Moruj* I, sec. 538, II, sec. 1376).

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