



ŠAHRESTĀNĪHĀ Ī ĒRĀNŠAHR

ŠAHRESTĀNĪHĀ Ī ĒRĀNŠAHR (The Provincial Capitals of Iran), the only major surviving Middle Persian text on geography: it enumerates the cities, their builders, and their importance for Persian history. The text was put to final redaction in the Abbasid period (late eighth or early ninth centuries CE), as it mentions Abu Ja'far as the founder of Baghdad (sec. 60), referring to the Caliph al-Mansur (754-775 CE). The picture of *Ērānšahr* given by the text suggests that it was also redacted at the time of Xusrō II in the seventh century CE, as it mentions such places as *yaman* "Yemen" (sec. 33), conquered by Xusrō I in the sixth century, and *frīgā* "Africa" (sec. 33), probably referring to Egypt and places further south which were conquered by the Sasanians between 619 and 628 CE (Altheim-Stiehl, 1992, p. 92). The *Bundahišn* mentions a book called *Ayādgār ī Šahrīhā* "Memoir of Cities" (Tafazzoli, 1997-98, p. 265), which may be the very same book on geography that Kawād I ordered to be written (Tavadia, 1956, p. 204).

The book divides *Ērānšahr* into four *kusts* "regions," or "sides." This division is known to have taken place during the reign of Xusrō I (Frye, 1983, p. 333; Brunner, 1985, p. 750; Daryaei, 2003, p. 195). The four *kusts* are presented in the following order: (1) *Xwarāsān* "northeast"; (2) *Xwarwarān* "southwest"; (3) *Nēmrōz* "southeast"; and (4) *Ādurbādagān* (see [Azarbaijan i, iii](#)) "northwest" (Cereti, 2001, p. 203). The usual Middle Persian term for the northern direction, *abāxtar*, is in this text replaced by the province name *ādurbādagān*, because the Zoroastrian association of the north with the abode of evil would be evoked by use of *abāxtar* (Tafazzoli, 1989-90, p. 333; 1997-98, p. 266; Cereti,



2001, p. 203). Another interesting point is that the *kusts* are mentioned in the text in a diagonal manner, beginning from northeast to southwest, and from southeast to northwest, which may be an old Persian tradition (Daryaeae, 2000-01, pp. 796-801), as Darius I also recounts the borders of the Achaemenid Empire in such a fashion (Kent, 1953, pp. 136-37).

The content of the *Šahrestānīhā ī Ērānšahr* is important in that it provides a mélange of historical and mythical information on people, and stories in the Iranian tradition, from the Avesta to the Persian epics. For example, for *kust ī Xwarāsān* old Iranian/Avestan traditions are emphasized, such as the mention of the story of Siyāwaxš and Zoroaster's appearance, and the battle with Frāsiyāk (see [AFRĀSIĀB](#)) and the Turānians. Such pieces of information are placed alongside historical information such as the mention of Turkic tribes and their leaders such as Sinjēbīk Xāgān, who was the contemporary of Xusrō I (Nyberg, 1974, p. 176), and Čōl Xāgān, who was killed by Wahrām Čōbīn (Harmatta and Litvinsky 1996, p. 368). Also the [Arsacids](#) and their city-building activities are emphasized, followed by Sasanian kings and their building activities.

For the *kust ī Nēmrōz*, Rostam and epic material such as the establishment of the Karkōy Fire (see [ĀDUR](#)) by Kay Xusrō is mentioned. This story finds a somewhat similar treatment in the *Tāriḵ-e Sistān* (pp. 35-37). For *kust ī Ādurbādagān* it is mentioned that the city of Jey (q.v.; i.e., Isfahān) was a Jewish stronghold and that Āmol was where the *zandīg ī purr-marg* “the heretic who is full of death,” namely, Mazdak, was from, which finds echoes in the *Tāriḵ-e Tabarestān* (p. 201). Also Zoroaster's birthplace is located in this *kust*, but the name of the city—which was probably *rāy* “Ray,” based on the Middle Persian tradition—is omitted in the text.

There are some pieces of information in the *Šahrestānīhā ī Ērānšahr* which, although mentioned in other Middle Persian texts, are here described differently. For example, the writing of the Avesta is described in the following manner (sec. 4): “Then Zoroaster brought the Religion. By the order of king Wištāsp 1,200 fragard (chapters) in the script of religious scripture were engraved on golden tablets and written and deposited in the treasury of that fire-(temple)” (*pas zardušt dēn āwurd az framān (ī) wištāsp-šāh 1000 ud 200 fragard pad dēn dibīrīh pad taxtagīhā (ī) zarrēn kand ud nibišt ud pad ganj (ī) ān ātaxš nihād*; Daryaeae, 2002, p. 17). What is different here from parallel accounts is that it is reported that the Avesta is written on golden tablets, followed by the depositing of the Avesta in the treasury of the fire-temple. In



other Middle Persian texts, the Avesta is said to have been written on *gāw pōstīhā* “cow hides” and written with *ab ī zarr* “gold water.” Furthermore, the Avesta was deposited in the *ganj ī šāhīgān* “royal treasury,” and a copy was kept in the *diz ī nibišt* “fortress of writing;” and lastly the Avesta was said to either have been burnt or taken to Rome by Alexander the Great (de Menasce, 1973, p. 379; Humbach, 1991, pp. 50-51).

A series of toponyms unique in Middle Persian is provided in the text, such as *mūsel* “Mosul” (sec. 31); *gazīrag* “Jazirah” (sec. 32); *šām* “Syria,” *yaman* “Yemen,” *frīgā* “Africa,” *kufah* “Kufa,” *makkah* “Mecca,” *madīnag* “Medina” (sec. 33). Another important piece of historical information is the mention of Sasanian troops (sec. 52) in Arabia, who were stationed at “the fort of the Arabs,” that is, *Ḥira*. The army groups were called *dō-sar* “two-headed” and **bor-gil* (“gray troop”: discussion in Nyberg, 1974, pp. 65, 49); they are *dausar* and *šahbā’* “gray” in Arabic sources (Rothstein, 1899, pp. 134-38),

The structure and language of the *Šahrestānīhā ī Ērānšahr* is formulaic and has the following construction: *šahrestān* x was built by y; *šahrestān* x and z were built by y; *šahrestān* x was built by y, and z completed it; and *šahrestān* x was built by y and *šahrestān* x by y (Daryaeae, 2002, p. 11).

There have been several editions and translations of the *Šahrestānīhā ī Ērānšahr* in various languages. These include E. Blochet in French (1897, pp. 165-76); J. J. Modi (1899) in Gujarati and English; J. Markwart (1931) posthumously in English; S. Yu. Kasumova in Russian (1994, pp. 45-124); Š. Hedāyat (1944, pp. 412-33), providing the first Persian translation; followed by S. ‘Oriān (1983, pp. 593-619) and A. Tafazzoli (1989-90, pp. 332-49), and T. Daryaeae (2002), providing an English and Persian translation. S. H. Nyberg also published the text of *Šahrestānīhā ī Ērānšahr* in his Pahlavi manual and provided important notes (1964, pp. 113-17, 203-4).

The *Šahrestānīhā ī Ērānšahr* is based on the MK codex which was edited by J. M. Jamasp-Asana. The text was edited based on another manuscript known as JJ (Modi, 1913, pp. 18-24) as well, which now appears to have been lost. The MK codex was copied by a Persian Zoroastrian priest named Mehrabān Kay-Xusrō in the 14th century, who traveled from Iran to India to assist the Parsi priests in their religious tradition. The codex consisted of 163 folios, with *Šahrestānīhā ī Ērānšahr* in fols. 19b, line 5-fol. 26a, line 6. The MK codex was copied from a manuscript written for a Parsi priest named Dēn-Panāh, son of Adūrbād who had written it for Šahzād ī Šādān-Farrox-Ohrmazd, who was at the fire-temple



of Broach (Daryae, 2002, p. 12).

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