

3. Mon Sep 25 Before Islam: the Sasanian Empire

Introductory statement

3.0

3.1 A sketch of the Sasanian Empire

3.2 The inscription of Darius at Behistan

3.3 The inscription of Kerdair at Nagsh-e Rostam

3.4 Extracts on the Sasanian Empire

3.5 A Muslim retrospect

Now that you have been introduced to the Byzantine Empire, we move east to the Sasanian (or Persian) Empire, named for the dynasty that ruled it (the Sasanids). This empire was established in the third century and lasted till the Arabs destroyed it in the seventh. There had, however, been an earlier Persian Empire in the same region, in fact an even larger one; this was the Achaemenid Empire of the sixth to fourth centuries B.C. In between, after a period of Greek rule, there had been another Iranian (though not exactly Persian) empire. All this means that Iran had a high-profile imperial tradition, and this is what we will be concentrating on in this seminar.

Reading 3.1: Taken from the same textbook as 2.1, this gives you an idea of the history and character of the Sasanian Empire in its last century. The question you should be thinking about is how and why this empire differs from the one we looked at last time.

Reading 3.2: This gives you extracts from a translation of a major rock inscription in which Darius (ruled 522-486 B.C.), the greatest ruler of the Achaemenid Empire, gets his message out in three languages (Old Persian, Akkadian, and Elamite). We are not concerned with the details, so you can skip over them fairly rapidly. You should read this text as a piece of royal self-presentation, and think about its way of going about this. Look particularly at the relationship between religion and royal power. I should mention that Ahuramazda is the Zoroastrian god, Zoroastrianism being the religion of Iran down to the Arab conquest.

Reading 3.3: This gives you extracts from a translation of an inscription in which Kerdair, who was high priest of the Zoroastrian "church" under the early Sasanian rulers (third century A.D.), gets his message out. ("Ohrmazd" is the Middle Persian form of the name Ahuramazda.) Again, don't get bogged down in the details. How does this inscription compare with that of Darius?

Reading 3.4: This is a rag-bag. Sections A and D are taken from Zoroastrian religious texts. Section B gives you an exotic contrast with the inscription of Darius. Section C gives you a few extracts from a royal inscription contemporary with Kerdīr. Again, the idea of these extracts is to convey a sense of the Persian imperial tradition and how it relates to Zoroastrianism. Section E is a bit different: this gives you some indications as to how the cultural elite of the Byzantine Empire regarded the Sasanian Empire.

Reading 3.5: Originally I wanted to use an extract from Tabari to show you how Muslims looked back on the Sasanian Empire, but at the time I was putting this sourcebook together in 1998 the relevant volume of the translation hadn't yet appeared. So instead, I put in a text which was written in Persian by an eleventh-century Muslim vizier (you will meet him again as a historical figure in his own right near the end of the course). Having used this text once, I've come to like it, so I've kept it. It doesn't demand as close reading as the inscriptions—the fact is it's a yarn—but before you start you need to know who Mazdak was (if you don't, go back to Reading 3.1 and look for him at the foot of page 165). What's this writer's attitude to the Sasanian Empire, and how does it differ from Tabari's approach to the Byzantine Empire?

cut in Persian
 terms (gills, pers.) - forward
 smoke - lot like M.
 Sasanian



43

THE WORLD OF LATE ANTIQUITY

AD 150-750

PETER BROWN

with 130 illustrations 17 in color

Picture research: Georgina Buckler

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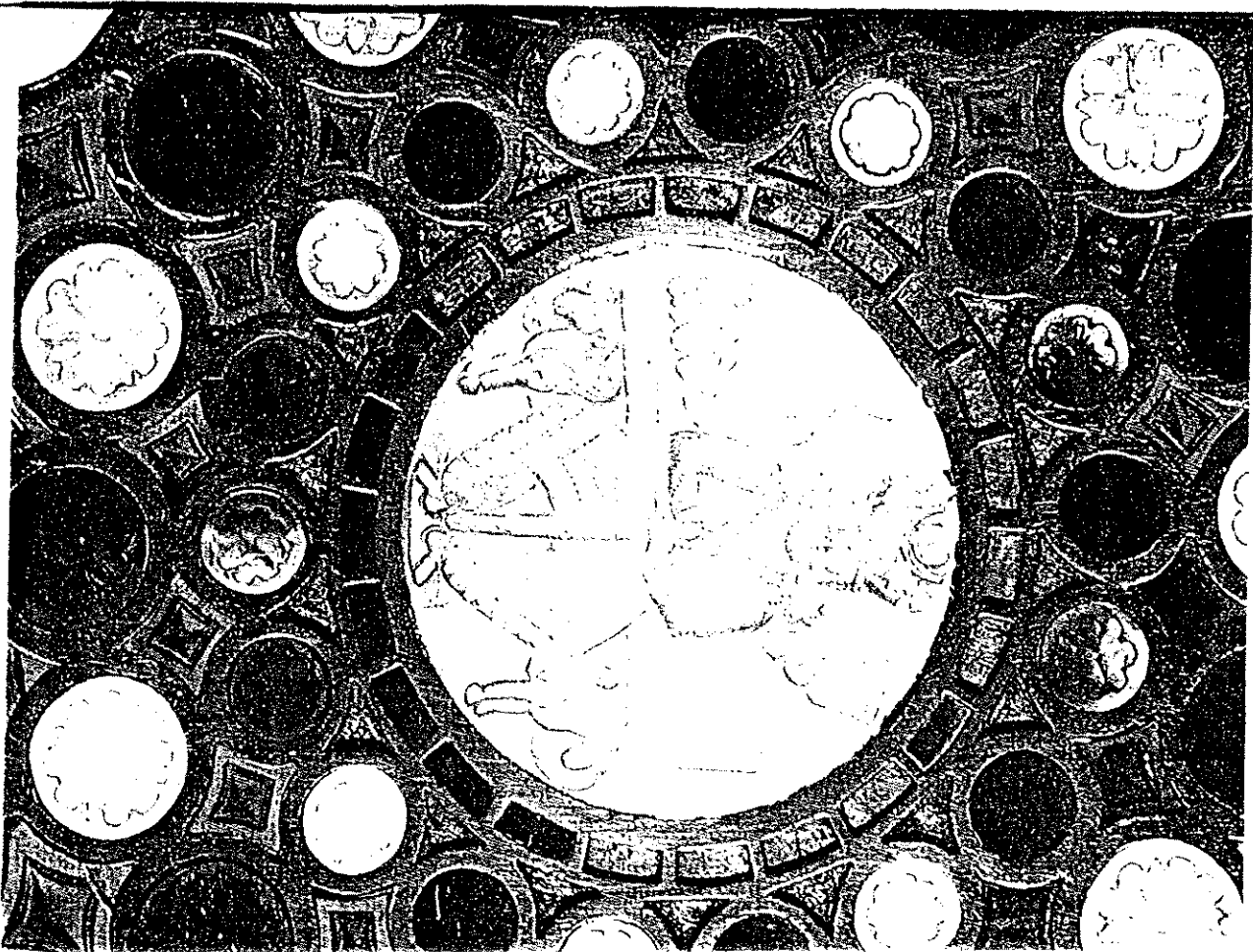
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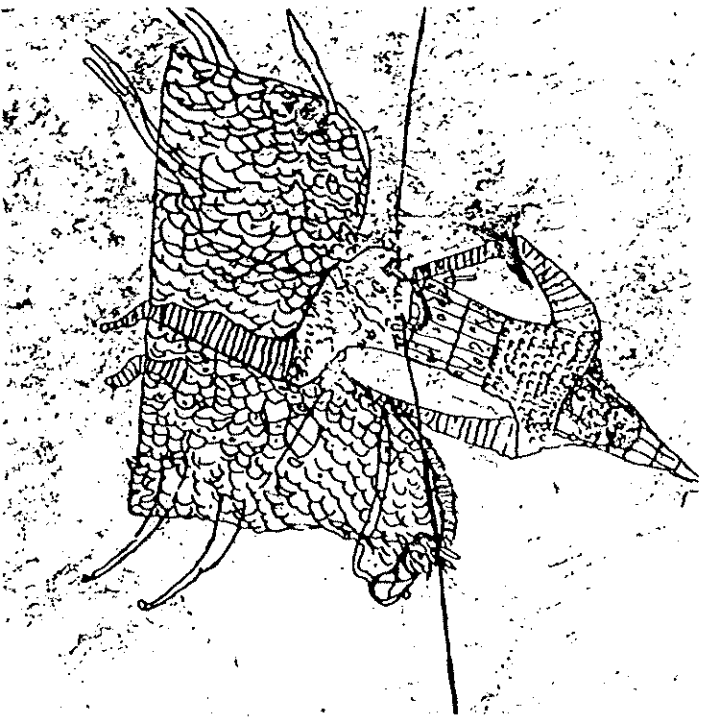
In the palace of Khusrō I Anoshirwan at Ctesiphon (on the Euphrates, thirty-five miles south of modern Baghdad), three empty seats stood beneath the royal throne. These were for the emperor of China, for the great khagan (the ruler of the nomads of central Asia), and for the Roman emperor, in case these rulers came, as vassals, to the court of the king of kings. The three thrones summed up the vast horizons of the Sassanian empire. Persia was the link between East and West. It was from sixth-century Ctesiphon that Indian science and Indian legends – particularly the story of the Buddha (known in the West as the story of Barlaam and Josaphat – from 'Boddhisattva') – filtered into the Mediterranean. Chinese travellers knew Persia well, while their knowledge of the Roman world stopped at Antioch. In the early Middle Ages, Persian *condottieri* defended the northern frontiers of China. It was they who introduced into the Far East the skills of cavalry-warfare, learnt in constant conflict with the nomads of central Asia.

For Persia was, above all, a central Asian power. The settled, agricultural life of the Iranians, especially in the rich lands of Gurgan (classical Hyrcania) by the Caspian, had always been threatened by nomads from the steppes of Turkestan. It was still remembered, in the sixth century, that both the Persians' religious leader, Zoroaster, and their greatest king, Darius, had died fighting against central Asian raiders. Traditional Persian society had as acute a sense of the 'barbarian' as did the Romans. Khusrō I never celebrated his capture of Antioch on coins; but when, in 568, he crushed the great nomad empire of the Hephthalites (the White Huns) on his northern border, a special issue proclaimed, 'Iran delivered from fear'. The Central Asian frontier was the military laboratory of the Late Antique world. It was against the nomads that the Persian aristocracy developed the 'cataphract' (the heavily armoured horseman), a predecessor of the medieval knight. Typically, this new technique was known to the Romans by the name first used in the Syrian slang of Mesopotamia – 'boiler boy': the eastern provincials of Byzantium, witnessing these iron-cased warriors from Transoxiana, passed on their Syrian name to the Roman army, in its Latin translation – *libanarius*.

In central Asia, also, the civilization of Persia dominated early medieval Bokhara and Samarkand. The sub-Iranian society of



106 Khusrō I Anoshirwan (531-70). Unlike Justinian the Christian, the shah is shown as a warrior. He sits on his throne holding his drawn sword. Detail from the so-called Cup of Khusrō, sixth century.



107 The *ethammis*, the armoured horseman. Second- to third-century graffito at Dura-Europos

108 Mani, as shown by his devotees in the Turfan oasis. A religious leader born in southern Mesopotamia, his message spread through Syria to the Roman empire and through Central Asia to China (fifth- to ninth-century wall painting from Khocho (Turfan), China).

Soghdia, which included these great towns, linked East and West. In the sixth century, Soghdian middlemen sold the knowledge of the silkworm to the emperor Justinian, just as, a century previously, they had sold Roman techniques of glass-making to the emperor of China. In this island of Persian culture, the two-fores of Christianity that had grown up in Persian-dominated Mesopotamia – the radical asceticism of the Manichees (the followers of Mani, see below, p. 164) and the humane Christianity of the Nestorians – flourished until the Mongol invasions of the thirteenth century. In the oasis of Turfan, in the south-western Gobi Desert, Manichaean liturgies of the tenth century still presented Heaven as a court ruled by the same protocol as that devised for the palace of Khusro I Anoshirwan in distant Ctesiphon.

Westerners, reared on Herodotus, regard a confrontation between the Roman empire and Persia as natural. Yet, given the time-honoured commitment of the Iranian governing classes to central Asia, the constant westward pressure of the Persian empire against the



frontiers of Byzantium throughout the sixth century is exceptional. Previously the Roman empire had been saved by the sheer size of its rival. The Persian empire uncoiled, like a dragon's tail, across the harsh and rugged land east of the Zagros range, as far as the Oxus, Afghanistan and the Indus valley. The austere, arid plateau of Iran – the Castle of the Near East – was the traditional heart of the Persian empire. Here a rigid Zoroastrian orthodoxy was unchallenged in the sixth century. Here, also, the great traditional families had held despotic sway. In the holy cities of Isakhr and Persepolis, and on the rock-faces of Naqsh-e-Rustam, the Sassanian kings of kings drew up traditions that reached back to the Achaemenids: Shapur I placed himself next to Cyrus and Darius. In Mesopotamia, by contrast, the Iranian governing class travelled down into a foreign country. At the court of Ctesiphon, the nobility lived in a separate quarter, in palaces well stocked (so a Chinese traveller observed) with ice: they yearned for their summer retreat in the great hunting-lodges of Holwan, in the mountains of Media proper. Outside Ctesiphon, the

population spoke Syriac. They were mainly Nestorian Christians, living alongside important Jewish communities. Many a Persian aristocrat, in the late sixth century, 'went native' in Mesopotamia by becoming a Nestorian Christian, and so had to learn to chant his Psalm book in Syriac.

Mesopotamia, however, was the economic heart of the Persian empire. The shahs derived two-fifths of their revenues from it. Here was an ancient urban society that provided the skills on which the court depended. Since the raids of Shapur I on the Roman empire in the 250s, Persian-controlled Mesopotamia – especially Kluzistan in southern Iraq – was permeated with settlements of deportees from the eastern Mediterranean. Its towns provided the shahs with their architects and engineers. The weavers on whom the glory of sixth-century Sassanian silks depended lived in them; and so did the financiers. The term for the land-tax originated in the Aramaic of the fifth century B.C. it was still in use under the Sassanians (as we can see from the Jewish Talmud), and it emerged as the official, Arabic designation – *kharaq* – for the land-tax on which the finances of the Arab empire depended.

Mesopotamia was an area of immense creativity. From the third century A.D. the views of its religious leaders had impinged on the conservatives of both the Roman and the Persian empires. Mani, the founder of Manichaeism (216–77), was a typical product of this environment. Living at the crossroads of Asia, he had felt challenged, as no religious thinker round the 'little frog-pond' of the Mediterranean had felt challenged, to create a self-consciously universal religion. He was aware of the confrontation between the world religions of East and West: the Buddha and Zoroaster figured alongside Christ in his message. Manichaean missionaries reached northern Spain in the fifth century; by the seventh, they were in Peking. In the same enriching environment, Nestorian Christianity settled down as the only truly oriental church. Excluded from the orthodox Roman empire, the Nestorians struck up a delicate *modus vivendi* with the Persian governing class. Nestorian clergymen followed the Persian-dominated trade-routes as far apart as Fukien and Ceylon: the Syrian Christians of Kerala (southern India) looked to Ctesiphon. In 638, the Nestorians offered a statement of their beliefs to the emperor of China: it was a quite unmistakable echo, in a strange environment, of the arguments first propounded by Christian Apologists in Antioch

and Alexandria. Throughout the early Middle Ages, the Syriac-speaking clergy of Persian Mesopotamia carried many intriguing scraps of culture between the Far East and the Mediterranean.

In Mesopotamia, moreover, a crucial development for medieval and modern Europe took place: the final crystallization of rabbinic Judaism. Protected by the shahs from Christian intolerance, the rabbis of Mesopotamia gained intellectual pre-eminence over their cowed brethren in Palestine. They compiled the Babylonian Talmud. At a time when the emperor Justinian was laying down which version of the Scriptures the Jews should be allowed to read in the synagogues of his empire, the rabbis of Ctesiphon were free to conduct a vigorous polemic against the Christian doctrines of the Trinity and the Virgin Birth. Searching criticisms aired in the cities of Persian Mesopotamia soon filtered along the caravan routes into Arabia, where they had a decisive influence on the epoch-making monotheism of Muhammad.

Mesopotamia, therefore, stood to one side in the Persian empire. Its towns, its contacts with the Mediterranean, its high proportion of settlers from the Roman empire, marked it off from the arid, landlocked and jealously traditionalist world of the Iranian plateau. The shah called himself 'King of Kings of Iran and of the non-Iranian territories'. In the first centuries, these did not overlap. Yazdkart I (399–421), for instance, was popular with his Mesopotamian subjects; he was detested by the Iranian conservatives, to whom he was known as 'Yazdkart the Sinner'. His successor, Vahram Gur (421–39), was known to the Byzantines as a truculent persecutor of the Christians: in Persia, he was treasured throughout the Middle Ages as the bluff King Hal of Persian history – the perfect Iranian gentleman, a passionate hunter, generous to the nobility, an upholder of Zoroastrian orthodoxy.

In the late fifth century, however, the traditionalist world of the Iranian plateau collapsed and Mesopotamia came into its own. After seven years of famine, the shah Firuz (459–84) was killed with his whole army in a rash campaign against the Hephthalite Huns. The 'Famine Days of Firuz', and the total defeat of Persia by the nomads of Central Asia, were remembered as the worst tragedy in Persian history before the Arab invasion. It was the end of the Iranian ancient régime. Undermined by defeat, threatened by an outburst of apocalyptic radicalism – by the movement of Mazdak, a religious leader, whose

teachings had sparked off *jacqueries* at the time of famine – the survivors of the conservative nobility rallied round the young shah, Khusro I, for protection: they gave him his title, Anoshirwan (Immortal Soul), when, as crown prince, he massacred the followers of Mazdaik in 528. Khusro protected the nobility, but on his own terms. He tied the Zoroastrian clergy and the great families to his court. A new class of professionals gradually took over the administration. Many were Christians: they came from Mesopotamia, not from Iran.

Khusro was remembered in the Near East as the just king *par excellence*. He had his own views on the purpose of this justice: 'The monarchy depends on the army, the army on money; money comes from the land-tax; the land-tax comes from agriculture. Agriculture depends on justice, justice on the integrity of officials, and integrity and reliability on the ever-watchfulness of the King.' While his contemporary, Justinian, was also remembered as 'the just', it was as a codifier of law: Khusro, by contrast, realized the formidable Near Eastern ideal of the long-armed king. 'Go write letters to them,' he told the Nestorian patriarch, on hearing of a rebellion in Khuzistan, 'that if every rebel does not have the goodness to keep quiet, I shall go up against them with sword, bow and arrow, and I shall kill every man who persists in his insubordination against me – be he a good Zoroastrian, a Jew or a Christian.'

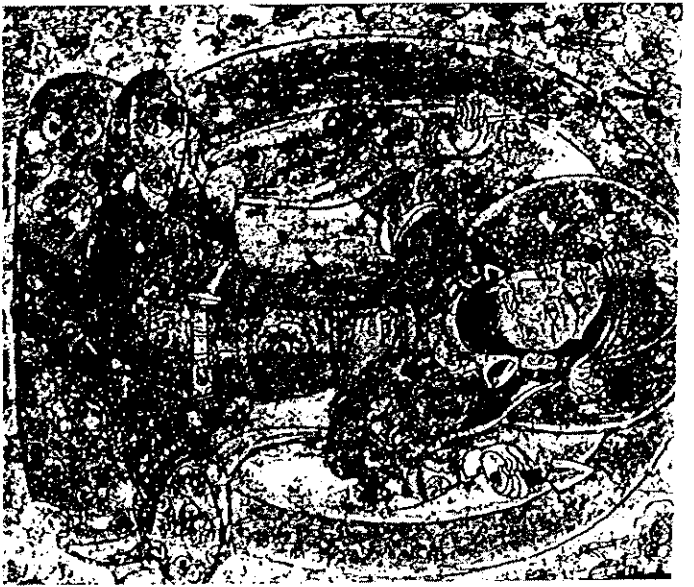
The forty-eight years of harsh rule by Khusro I and the thirty-seven years of brittle grandeur under his grandson, the erratic Khusro II Aparwez – (the victorious, 501–628), mark the true birth of the Middle Ages in the Near East. At least a generation before the arrival of the Arabs, Persian society had been weaned from its past, and given a form that lasted far into the Middle Ages. Just as, in the West, the emperor Augustus was remembered as an insubstantial shade beside the palpable figures of Constantine and Justinian, so, in the Near East, the shahs before Khusro are remote fairy-tale figures. The history of the medieval Near East began with Khusro – Keera to the Arabs, Khusraw in modern Persia.

The caste-ridden, aristocratic structure of the fifth-century world was loosened. The courtier-gentleman – the *dokkan* – emerged as the backbone of Persian society. The *dokkan* stood for a new way of life. He was a substantial landowner, a soldier and a courtier. Like its Byzantine equivalent, the new administrative elite created a new culture that was a blend of preciosity and professionalism. The *dokkans*

were eclectic: Khusro I patronized translations both of Greek philosophy and of the courtly fairy-tales of north India. While their predecessors in the fourth and fifth centuries had been shown, in massive rock-carvings, locked in epic combat with enemies or wild beasts, these courtiers played games: chess, polo, and, in hunting, the delicate skill of falconry replaced the big game hunt of earlier centuries. The great archetypal figures of the kings disappear. Fauxstie, embroidered silks were more to the taste of the Persians of the late sixth century. Above all, in the court of Khusro Anoshirwan, we leave the age of the gods for the age of men. Zoroastrianism became merely a conservative sentiment. The shahs are no longer shown receiving their powers face to face with their god, Ahura Mazda: Khusro appears only with his courtiers. The mystique of the sixth century was the *far-i-padhshahi* – the nimbus of the king of kings. Long after Persia ceased to be Zoroastrian, the *dokkans* maintained this reverence for their monarch.

These developments determined the course of Near Eastern history for the next five hundred years. Like a submerged rock, the court society created in Persia by Khusro I Anoshirwan and perfected by Khusro II Aparwez deflected the course of the Arab empire. 'The Persian conquest of Islam' in the eighth and ninth centuries was expressed in the foundation of the Abbasid caliphate at Baghdad, within sight of the deserted halls of Ctesiphon. It was the last efflorescence of forms of life created, in the Near East, in the Late Antique period.

In many ways, the reformed Persian society of the late sixth century gravitated round a sub-Byzantine court whose centre lay in Mesopotamia. Byzantine architects helped to build the palace at Ctesiphon; the Byzantine hand-tax provided the model for the reforms of Khusro I; Aristotle was adopted at this time to redefine points of Zoroastrian ethics; Mesopotamian Christians, who spoke the same Syriac language as did their neighbours across the frontier, transmitted Byzantine medicine, philosophy and court manners to the Sassanian capital. Often, the frontier stood wide open. In 527, Nestorian Christian professors from the Persian city of Nisibis were welcomed in Constantinople; in 532, Platonic philosophers from Athens stayed with Khusro at Ctesiphon. Byzantium and Persia were drawn closer together by the wealth and creativity of the populations of the Fertile Crescent. The constant, exhausting state of war that



109 The Persian afterglow in Central Asia: a Hindu deity painted in the Persian manner, in Khotan. Seventh- to tenth-century panel painting from the Hu-Kuo convent in Chinese Turkestan (ancient Khotan)

reigned between them from 540 to 561, 572 to 591 and 602 to 629, was the result of two societies forced into proximity.

Khusro I unwittingly destroyed the balance of the Persian empire. He had tacitly abandoned Iran and Central Asia for Mesopotamia. Deprived of their former horizons, the Sassanian shahs of the late sixth and early seventh century were forced to bid against Byzantium – a state economically if not militarily superior to their own – for the hegemony of the Near East.

The amazing feature of the sixth century was the rapid rise of Persia on the eastern frontiers of Byzantium. From being the Sick Man of the Near East in the late fifth century, Persia caught up with its rival. At the beginning of Khusro I's reign, Persia was a parasite of Byzantium: the shah used his formidable war-machine to extort money from its richer neighbour by blackmail. The looting of the Byzantine provinces by Khusro I 'primed the pump' for Persian emergence out of bankruptcy. Under Khusro II, Persia became the financial giant of the Near East, and the shah the centre of a fairy-tale court.

Khusro II was the fateful heir of the policies of Khusro I. He had the makings of an emperor of the united Near East. Largely estranged from the nobility of Persia proper, he had been put back on the throne, in 591, with the help of Byzantine mercenaries. He was surrounded by Christians. His wife, the beautiful Shirin, and his financial wizard, Yazden of Kerkuk, were Nestorians. He shrewdly addressed his propaganda to the Christian populations on both sides of the frontier: he ascribed his successes to the protection of St Sergius, the patron saint of the Syriac-speakers and of the Arabs of the Fertile Crescent. In this half-Christian form, the shadow of the King of Kings lengthened across the western section of the Near East.

Khusro II found his chance in 603. He invaded the Byzantine empire, ostensibly to avenge the fallen emperor Maurice and to uphold legitimate rule against the usurper Phocas. The dream of the new Mesopotamian court, to reunite the Fertile Crescent as in the days of Cyrus, Xerxes and Darius, seemed near accomplishment. Antioch fell in 613, Jerusalem in 614, Egypt in 619; by 620, the Persian watch-towers were visible, across the Bosphorus, from the walls of Constantinople. And Khusro II had come to stay: Persian governors in Egypt have left tax-documents in Pehlevi which take up traditions of Persian domination that had lapsed in Egypt – for a mere nine hundred years! – since the days of the Achaemenids.

The Byzantine empire was saved by the skills developed in the reign of Justinian. Heraclius mobilized the popular feeling of Constantinople. He fought brilliant campaigns with a small, ferociously disciplined army. He vanished into the Caucasus with every bit of money that he could lay his hands on – even the treasures of the Hagia Sophia were melted down to coin gold pieces – to conduct a subsidy-diplomacy, after the model of Justinian, on the northern doorstep of Persia. In alliance with the Khazars, Heraclius struck south, in 627, into the heart of Khusro's empire. The great palace of the king of kings at Dastgerd was burnt; and Khusro, discredited by this lightning raid on the unprotected estates and holy cities of the Zoroastrian clergy and nobility, was murdered by his ministers in 628.

The war was a catastrophe for the settled populations of the Near East. The prosperity of the villages outside Antioch ended abruptly after 613; Alexandria was left partly deserted; the conquered territories were mercilessly taxed and stripped of their skilled labour. As for Persia, the gamble of Near Eastern rule had failed. There was

nothing left to fall back on. Persia was unable to survive military defeat at the hands of the Arabs after 641. Its heart was burnt out. When the Muslim armies reached the Iranian plateau, they found anarchy.

But the most fatal weakness of all was that neither great empire was prepared for what followed – for the explosion from the primitive south of the Fertile Crescent associated with the rise of Islam.

The spectacular wars between Persia and Byzantium had been fought out along the northern tip of the Fertile Crescent: from the Caucasus to northern Mesopotamia, the countryside had been covered with expensive fortifications: armies had marched and counter-marched across its familiar landscape. By contrast, the soft underbelly of the Fertile Crescent had been defended by a fragile network of alliances among the neighbouring Arab tribes: east of Damascus at Djalyra, the Ghassanids – the Banu Ghassan – policed the frontier as Byzantine feudatories; at Hira, the Lakhmid kingdom formed a buffer state, shielding Ctesiphon itself from the desert that lay only a hundred miles from its walls.

In their last great war, both sides had forgotten about the Arabs. From being carefully nourished protégés of the great powers, the Arabs of the frontiers were in danger of becoming the pariahs of the Near East. The delicate defensive system, that had maintained a balance between cultivated land and the desert from southern Iraq to Sinai, had been washed away. The Roman forts stood deserted. The sheiks were no longer reputed to control their followers. Already during the Persian occupation, Beduin raided with impunity up to the gates of Jerusalem.

If the two great powers had forgotten about the Arabs, the Arabs themselves felt drawn closer than ever before in their history to the rich towns and disturbing ideas of the settled countries to their north. In Mecca a merchant oligarchy had begun, about 600, to invest large sums in direct trade with southern Syria and Hira. Meccan caravans contributed to an unexpected boom in the economic life of Damascus, Bostra, Gerasa (Jerash) and Gaza. These southern towns throve when northern Syria lay desolate. Meccan merchants (the least successful among them being a certain Muhammad) were well established outside Damascus. The steady pressure of the Arab merchant-adventurers up into the undefended southern frontiers was a warning that already all roads might lead to Mecca.



110 The courtly ethos. The court of Khosro II Aparwez (591-628) reached unparalleled peaks in sophistication and *je ne sais quoi*, that remained a model for the social life of countries and empires throughout the Middle Ages. Detail of sixth-century Sassanian silver-gilt jug.



Of this, the triumphant Byzantines knew nothing. They came from the far north to provinces that had slipped out of their control for up to twenty years. They were interested in more important things. A eunuch came to Damascus with money, and the Arabs who guarded the frontier came to him and asked for their usual subsidy. The eunuch drove them away in anger, saying: "The emperor has hardly got money enough to pay his own army: how shall we give away his money to these dogs?" (Theophanes, *Chronicle*.)

OLD PERSIAN

GRAMMAR TEXTS LEXICON

BY
ROLAND G. KENT

*Professor Emeritus of Indo-European Linguistics
University of Pennsylvania*

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father was Teispes; Teispes' father was Achae-

§3. 1.6-8. Saith Darius the King: For this

reason we are called Achaeamenians. From long

ago we have been noble. From long ago our family

had been kings.

§4. 1.8-11. Saith Darius the King: VIII of our

family (there are) who were kings afore; I am the

ninth; IX in succession we have been kings.

§5. 1.11-2. Saith Darius the King: By the favor

of Ahuramazda I am King; Ahuramazda bestowed

the kingdom upon me.

§6. 1.12-17. Saith Darius the King: These are

the countries which came unto me; by the favor

of Ahuramazda they were my subjects; they bore

tribute to me; what was said unto them by me

either by night or by day, that was done.

§8. 1.20-4. Saith Darius the King: Within these

countries, the man who was loyal, him I re-

warded well; (him) who was evil, him I punished

well; by the favor of Ahuramazda these countries

showed respect toward my law; as was said to

them by me, thus was it done.

§9. 1.24-6. Saith Darius the King: Ahura-

mazda bestowed the kingdom upon me; Ahura-

mazda bore me aid until I got possession of this

kingdom; by the favor of Ahuramazda I hold this

kingdom.

§10. 1.26-35. Saith Darius the King: This is

what was done by me after that I became king. A

son of Cyrus, Cambyses by name, of our family—

he was king here. Of that Cambyses there was

a brother, Smerdis by name, having the same mother and the same father as Cambyses. Afterwards, Cambyses slew that Smerdis. When Cambyses slew Smerdis, it did not become known to the people that Smerdis had been slain. Afterwards, Cambyses went to Egypt. When Cambyses had gone off to Egypt, after that the people became evil. After that the Lie waxed great in the country, both in Persia and in Media and in the other provinces.

Arshames' father was Artarshames; Artarshames'

Hystaspes; Hystaspes' father was Arshames;

§2. 1.3-6. Saith Darius the King: My father was

Hystaspes, grandson of Arshames, an Achaemenian.

Kings, King in Persia, King of countries, son of

§1. 1.1-3. I am Darius the Great King, King of

TRANSLATION OF DB I:

royal
kingdom

and the same year after that I became king. XIX battles I fought; by the favor of Ahuramazda I smote them and took prisoner IX kings. One was Gaumata by name, a Magian; he lied; thus he said: "I am Smerdis, the son of Cyrus;" he made Persia rebellious. One, Agyina by name, an Elamite; he lied, thus he said: "I am king in Elam;" he made Elam rebellious to me. One, Nidintu-Bel by name, a Babylonian; he lied; thus he said: "I am Nebuchadrezzar, the son of Nabonidus; he made Babylon rebellious. One, Martiya by name, a Persian; he lied; thus he said: "I am Imanish, king in Elam;" he made Elam rebellious. One, Phraortes by name, a Mede; he lied; thus he said: "I am Khshathrita, of the family of Cyaxares;" he made Media rebellious. One of Cyaxares;" he made Sagartia, of the family of Cyaxares;" he made Sagartia rebellious. One, Frada by name, a Margian; he lied; thus he said: "I am king in Margiana;" he made Margiana rebellious. One, Vahyazdada by name, a Persian; he lied; thus he said: "I am Smerdis, the son of Cyrus;" he made Persia rebellious. One, Arka by name, an Armenian; he lied; thus he said: "I am Nebuchadrezzar, the son of Nabonidus;" he made Babylon rebellious.

§53. 4.31-2. Saith Darius the King: These IX kings I took prisoner within these battles.

§54. 4.33-6. Saith Darius the King: These are the provinces which became rebellious. The Lie made them rebellious, so that these (men) deceived the people. Afterwards Ahuramazda put them into my hand; as was my desire, so I did unto them.

§55. 4.36-40. Saith Darius the King: Thou who shalt be king hereafter, protect thyself vigorously from the Lie; the man who shall be a Lie-follower, him do thou punish well, if thus thou shalt think, "May my country be secure!"

§56. 4.40-3. Saith Darius the King: This is what I did; by the favor of Ahuramazda, in one and the same year I did (it). Thou who shalt hereafter read this inscription, let that which has been done by me convince thee; do not thou think it a lie.

§57. 4.43-5. Saith Darius the King: I turn myself quickly to Ahuramazda, that this (is) true, not false, (which) I did in one and the same year.

§58. 4.45-50. Saith Darius the King: By the

TRANSLATION OF DB IV:
 §51. 4.1-2. Saith Darius the King: This is what was done by me in Babylon.
 §52. 4.2-31. Saith Darius the King: This is what I did by the favor of Ahuramazda in one

*all 9 were
 proper in
 part 2 part*

favor of Ahuramazda and of me much else was done; that has not been inscribed in this inscription; for this reason it has not been inscribed, lest whose shall hereafter read this inscription, to him what has been done by me seem excessive, (and) it not convince him, (but) he think it false.

§59. 4.50-2. Saith Darius the King: Those who were the former kings, as long as they lived, by them was not done thus as by the favor of Ahuramazda was done by me in one and the same year. §60. 4.52-6. Saith Darius the King: Now let that which has been done by me convince thee; thus to the people impart, do not conceal it; if this record thou shalt not conceal, (but) tell it to the people, may Ahuramazda be a friend unto thee, and may family be unto thee in abundance, and may thou live long!

§61. 4.57-9. Saith Darius the King: If this record thou shalt conceal, (and) not tell it to the people, may Ahuramazda be a smiter unto thee, and may family not be to thee!

§62. 4.59-61. Saith Darius the King: This which I did, in one and the same year by the favor of Ahuramazda I did; Ahuramazda bore me aid, and the other gods who are.

§63. 4.61-7. Saith Darius the King: For this reason Ahuramazda bore aid, and the other gods who are, because I was not hostile, I was not a Lie-follower, I was not a doer of wrong—neither I nor my family. According to righteousness I conducted myself. Neither to the weak nor to the powerful did I do wrong. The man who cooperated with my house, him I rewarded well; whoso did injury, him I punished well.

§64. 4.67-9. Saith Darius the King: Thou who shalt be king hereafter, the man who shall be a Lie-follower or who shall be a doer of wrong—unto them do thou not be a friend, (but) punish them well.

§65. 4.69-72. Saith Darius the King: Thou who shalt hereafter behold this inscription which I made, I made my lineage. And it was inscribed on tablets and on parchment it was composed. Besides, a sculptured figure of myself I made. Be-lie-follower or who shall be a doer of wrong. Besides, it was in Aryan, and on clay favor of Ahuramazda this is the inscription which I made. By the

§70. 4.88-92. Saith Darius the King: By the favor of Ahuramazda this is the inscription which I made. Besides, it was in Aryan, and on clay tablets and on parchment it was composed. Besides, a sculptured figure of myself I made. Be-lie-follower or who shall be a doer of wrong. Afterwards this inscription I sent off everywhere among the provinces. The people unitedly worked upon it.

§66. 4.72-6. Saith Darius the King: If thou shalt behold this inscription or these sculptures, (and) shalt not destroy them and shalt protect them as long as thou shalt be in good strength!

§67. 4.76-80. Saith Darius the King: If thou shalt behold this inscription or these sculptures, (and) shalt destroy them and shalt not protect them as long as thou shalt be in abundance, and may Ahuramazda be a friend unto thee, and may family be unto thee, and what thou shalt do, that for thee may Ahuramazda utterly destroy!

§68. 4.80-6. Saith Darius the King: These are the men who were there at the time when I slew Gaumata the Magian who called himself Smerdis; at that time these men cooperated as my followers; Intaphernes by name, son of Vayaspata, a Persian; Otanes by name, son of Thukhra, a Persian; Gobryas by name, son of Mardonius, a Persian; Hydarnes by name, son of Bagabigna, a Persian; Megabyzus by name, son of Datuvahya, a Persian; Ardumanish by name, son of Vahauka, a Persian.

§69. 4.86-8. Saith Darius the King: Thou who shalt be king hereafter, protect well the family of these men.

§70. 4.88-92. Saith Darius the King: By the favor of Ahuramazda this is the inscription which I made. Besides, it was in Aryan, and on clay tablets and on parchment it was composed. Besides, a sculptured figure of myself I made. Be-lie-follower or who shall be a doer of wrong. Afterwards this inscription I sent off everywhere among the provinces. The people unitedly worked upon it.

TRANSLATION OF DB V:

- §71. 5.1-14. Saith Darius the King: This is what I did in both the second and the third year after that I became king. A province by name Atamaita, an Elamite—him they made chief. Thereupon I sent forth an army. One man by name Gobryas, a Persian, my subject—him I made chief of them. After that, Gobryas with the army marched off to Elam; he joined battle with the Elamites. Thereupon Gobryas smote and crushed the Elamites, and captured the chief of them; he led him to me, and I killed him. After that the province became mine.
- §72. 5.14-7. Saith Darius the King: Those Elamites were faithless and by them Ahuramazda was not worshipped. I worshipped Ahuramazda; by the favor of Ahuramazda, as was my desire, thus I did unto them.
- §73. 5.18-20. Saith Darius the King: Whoso shall worship Ahuramazda, divine blessing will be upon him, both (while) living and (when) dead.
- §74. 5.20-30. Saith Darius the King: Afterwards with an army I went off to Scythia, after the Scythians who wear the pointed cap. These Scythians went from me. When I arrived at the sea, beyond it then with all my army I crossed. Afterwards, I smote the Scythians exceedingly; another (leader) I took captive; this one was led bound to me, and I slew him. The chief of them, by name Skunkha—him they seized and led to me. Then I made another their chief, as was my desire. After that, the province became mine.
- §75. 5.30-3. Saith Darius the King: Those Scythians . . . (= DB 5.15-7).
- §76. 5.33-6. . . . (= DB 5.18-20).

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(together with an account of
the representations of Kerdir)

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DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTARY

by
GEORGINA HERRMANN

KERDIR'S INSCRIPTION

(synoptic text in transliteration,
transcription, translation and commentary)

by
D. N. MACKENZIE

Photographs: Georgina Herrmann and Erik Smeekens
Drawings: Rosalind Howell Caldecott

DRAWINGS BY ROSALIND HOWELL CALDECOTT

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§ 1 I, Kerdir the Mobed, shall (continue to) be obedient and well-wishing (towards) the gods and Ardashir, king of kings, and Shapur, king of kings.

§ 2 And for that service which I have done towards the gods and Ardashir, king of kings, and Shapur, king of kings, he—Shapur, king of kings—made me absolute and authoritative in (the matter of) the rites of the gods, at the court and from province to province, place to place, throughout the Magian land. And at the command of Shapur, king of kings, and with the support of the gods and the king of kings, from province to province, place to place, the rites of the gods were much increased, and many Wahram fires were established, and many magians were (made) content and prosperous, and many charters (relating to) fires and mages were sealed and great profit came to Ohrmezd and the gods, and great harm to Ahreman and the demons.

§ 3 And (as for) these several fires and rites which (are mentioned) in the inscription, he—Shapur, king of kings—made an assignment even more so especially to me, (with the words), 'Let this be your basic resource, and as you know that a deed (will be) good for the gods and for us, act so.'

§ 4 And documents, charters and records which were made at that time, under Shapur, king of kings, at court and throughout the empire, from place to place,—on them has been written thus, 'Kerdir the Herbed'.

§ 5 And after Shapur, king of kings, went to the place of the gods and his son Hormizd, king of kings, established himself in the kingdom, Hormizd, king of kings, gave me cap | and belt and made my position and honour higher, and at court and from province to province, place to place, throughout the empire made me likewise in (the matter of) the rites of the gods more absolute and authoritative, and named me 'Kerdir the Mobed of Ohrmezd' in the name of the god Ohrmezd. Then also at that time from province to province, place to place, the rites of the gods were much increased, and many Wahram fires were established, and many magians were (made) content and prosperous, and many charters (relating to) fires and mages were sealed.

§ 6 And documents, charters and records which were made at that time, under Hormizd, king of kings, at court and throughout the empire, from place to place,—on them has been

to the crown he
Magian leader

Print of crown
Early Sassanid
Empire - close to
the Sassanid

And after Hormizd, king of kings, went to the place of the gods and Bahram, king of kings, son of Shapur, king of kings, established himself in the kingdom, he, Bahram, king of kings, in the same way held me in dignity and honour, and at court and from province to province, place to place, made me likewise in (the matter of) the rites of the gods absolute and authoritative. Then also at that time from province to province, place to place, the rites of the gods were much increased, and many Bahram fires were established, and many magians were (made) content and prosperous, and many charters (relating to) fires and mages were sealed.

And documents, charters and records which were made at that time, under Bahram, king of kings,—on them has been written thus, 'Kerdit the Mobed of Ohrmezd'.

And after Bahram, king of kings, son of Shapur went to the place of the gods and Bahram, king of kings, son of Bahram, who in the empire (is) generous and righteous and kind and beneficent and altruistic, established himself in the kingdom, for love of Ohrmezd and the gods and (for) his own soul he made for me in the empire a higher position and honour, and gave me the position and honour of the magnates, and made me at court and from province to province, place to place, throughout the empire in (the matter of) the rites of the gods (yet) more authoritative and absolute than I was before.

And he made me Mobed | and judge of the whole empire. And he made me director and authority over the fire of Anahid-Ardashir and Anahid the Lady (in) Stakhr. And he named me 'Kerdit, soul-saver of Bahram, Mobed of Ohrmezd'.

And from province to province, place to place, throughout the empire the rites of Ohrmezd and the gods became more important and the Mazdayasnan religion and magians were greatly honoured in the empire and great satisfaction befell the gods and water and fire and beneficent creatures, and great blows and torment befell Ahreman and the demons, and the heresy of Ahreman and the demons departed | and was routed from the empire. And Jews and Buddhists and Hindus and Mazarenes and Christians and Baptists and Manichaeanes were smitten in the empire, and idols were destroyed and the abodes of the demons disrupted and made into thrones and seats of the gods.

And from province to province, place to place, the rites of the gods were much increased, and many Bahram fires were established, and many magians were (made) content and prosperous, and many charters (relating to) fires and mages were sealed.

And documents, charters and records which (have been) made under Bahram, king of kings, son of Bahram,—on them has been written thus, 'Kerdit, soul-saver of Bahram, Mobed of Ohrmezd'.

And I, Kerdit, from the beginning have been at great trouble and pains for the sake of the gods and the lords and my own soul. And many fires and magians in the empire | of Iran—Persia, Parthia, Khuzestan (=Susiane), Asurestan (=Mesopotamia), Mesopotamia (=Mesene), Nodshiragan (=Adiabene), Adurbaiagan (=Atropatene), Spahan, [Ray], Kirman (=Kartman), Sagestan (=Sakastene), Gurgan (=Hyrcania), Marv, Herat, Abar-shahr (=Khorasan), Turstan (=Tourene), Makuran, the Kushan country up to Peshawar—I have made prosperous.

And also in the land of Aneran, the fires and magians which were in the land of Aneran where the horses and men of the king of kings reached—the city of Antioch and the land of Cilicia and what is attached to the province of Cilicia, the city of Caesarea and the land of Cappadocia and what is attached to the province of Cappadocia, up to the land of Graecia (=Pontus ?) and the land of Armenia and Iberia (=Georgia) and Albania and Balasagan up to the Gate of the Alps, Shapur, king of kings, with his horses and men conquered them all and he took booty and burned and laid them waste—there too, at the command of the king of kings, I made arrangements for the magians and the fires which were in those lands, I did not let them be harmed or taken as booty, and those which anyone had thus taken as booty I took and allowed them back to their own land.

And I made the Mazdayasnan religion and the good magians noble and honoured in the

§ 16

40

§ 15

35

§ 14

§ 13

§ 12

30

§ 11

§ 10

25

§ 9

20

§ 8

15

§ 7

not a separate chapter

not a separate chapter

some part of kings

And I wrote this memorial for this reason, that I, Kerdir, since long ago (have) set my seal upon many documents (and) charters (relating to) fires and to mages, of (different) rulers and lords, and my own name has often been written in (several) places on (such) documents, charters and records, so that whosoever at (some) future time may see a charter, a record or a document or some other memorial, may know that I am that Kerdir who under Shapur, king of kings, was called 'Kerdir the Mobed and Herbed', and under Hormizd king of kings, and Bahram (I), king of kings, the sons of Shapur, was called 'Kerdir the Mobed of Ohrmezd', and under Bahram (II), king of kings, son of Bahram, was called 'Kerdir, soul-saver of Bahram, Mobed of Ohrmezd'.

§ 38

But whosoever may see this memorial and read it out, let him be more liberal and true to the gods and the lords and his own soul and let him also be more confident in this worship and the rites and the Mazdayasnan religion, which are now performed among the living, and henceforth let him not be at all disobedient. And/for they should know for certain that there is a heaven and there is a hell, and he who is virtuous goes forth to heaven and he who is sinful is cast into hell, and whosoever may be virtuous and behave well with regard to good deeds, renown and prosperity will fall to this his material body and blessedness accrue to his durable soul, as it fell to me, Kerdir.

§ 37

in the...
Kerdir...
Kerdir...
Kerdir...

These lists of writings, like the Bible, which
seen repetitions, may have been compiled
from several versions of their fact may
be their repetitions.

Kings repeat parts who some he sons of kings.

59

And I made many documents (and) charters (relating to) fires and mages, and with the support of the gods and the king of kings and on account of me in the empire of Bran many Wahanam fires I were established, and many kin-marriages performed, and many men who were unbelievers became believers, and many were those who held the doctrine of the demons, and on account of me they left that doctrine of the demons, and many radpassag (ceremonies) were held, and the religion was much studied in various ways, and also the rites of the gods were much increased and became more important—which has not been written in this memorial, for if it had been written it would have been (too) much.

§ 17

in the...
Kerdir...
Kerdir...

45

3.4
Extracts on the Sasanian Empire

A. Phrases from the Avesta (?-century B.C.)

"homage to the Aryan homeland"
"for the protection of the Aryan lands"
"the families of the Aryan peoples, the seed of the Aryan peoples"

(Malandra, 53, 110, 114)

B. Inscriptions of the Indian ruler Asoka (third-century B.C.)

1. "I consider that I must promote the welfare of the whole world... And whatever may be my great deeds, I have done them in order to discharge my debt to all beings. I work for their happiness in this life, that in the next they may gain heaven."

(Thapar, 253)

2. "Eight years after the consecration of his sacred and gracious majesty, Kalinga was conquered. One hundred and fifty thousand in number were those carried off from there, a hundred thousand as many those who were slain there, and many times as many those who were dead... His sacred majesty felt remorse having conquered the Kalingas. His sacred majesty considered it very painful and deplorable that where an independent country is forcibly reduced, there are slaughter, death and deportation of people... Love is won in moral conquests. That love may be, indeed, slight, but his sacred majesty considers it productive of great fruit, indeed, in the world beyond."

(Mookerji, 162f, 169)

C. Trilingual inscription of Shapur I (ruled 241-72)

1. "I, the Mazda-worshipper, the god Shapur, King of Kings of the Aryans and non-Aryans, of the race of the gods..."
2. "I am the lord of the empire of the Aryan people. And I possess [these] lands: Persia, Parthia, ... These so numerous lands, [their] rulers and governors, we have reduced to subjection..."

3. "We burnt, devastated and pillaged the whole of Syria... We took the [Roman] emperor Valerian prisoner with our own hands... We achieved a great name for valour..."

4. "We have ordered this to be inscribed so that those who come after us will recognise this fame, this valour and this power..."

Handwritten notes:
royalty + nobility
kings + nobles
nobility
"Aryan" word for "war"
"Aryan" word for "war"

not
Christian
or Jewish

2. "Not long before, Damascus of Syria, Simplicius of Cilicia, Eulamius of Phrygia, Hermes and Diogenes of Phoenicia and Isidore of Gaza, all of them, to use a poetic turn of phrase, had come to the conclusion, since the official religion of the Roman Empire was not to their liking, that the Persian state was much superior. So they gave a ready hearing to the stories in general circulation according to which Persia was the land of "Plato's philosopher king" in which justice reigned supreme.... Elated by these reports which they accepted as true, and also because they were forbidden by law to take part in public life with impunity owing to the fact that they did not conform to the established religion, they immediately left and set off for a strange land whose ways were completely foreign to their own, determined to make

1. "Chosroes has been praised and admired quite beyond his deserts not just by the Persians but even by some Romans. He is in fact credited with being a lover of literature and a profound student of philosophy and someone is supposed to have translated the works of Greek literature into Persian for him. It is rumoured moreover that he has absorbed the whole of the Stagirite more thoroughly than the Paeanian orator absorbed the works of the son of Olorus, that his mind is filled with the doctrines of Plato the son of Ariston and that not even the Pimaenus, bristling as it does with geometrical theorems and scientific speculations, would elude his grasp, nor for that matter the Phaedo or the Gorgias or any other of the polished and more intricate dialogues, as for instance the Parmenides. Personally, I could never bring myself to believe that he was so remarkably well-educated and intellectually brilliant. How could the purity and nobility of those time-honoured writings with all their exactitude and felicity of expression be preserved in an uncouth and uncivilized tongue?"

from about 1st
of Roman
He is
from about 1st
- here (Chosroes was)

F. Agathias on the evil empire (sixth century A.D.)

(Zaehner, Magl, 94, 86)

1. "The basis of the Good Religion is the nobility inherent in the Iranian... and its helpmate is kingship."
 2. "The Religion... is like a mighty tree with... four branches. The four branches are the four religious castes by which the Religion and secular life are both maintained: the priesthood, the warrior caste, the caste of husbandmen, and the caste of artisans."

D. The Zoroastrian books (ninth-century)

5. "In each land we founded many [sacred] fires... we were generous to many priests...."

very
early

their homes there."

3. "But in the first place they discovered that those in authority were overbearing and vainglorious.... In the second place they realized that there were large numbers of house-breakers and robbers.... The opportunity of conversing with the king proved a further disappointment. It was that monarch's boast that he was a student of philosophy but his knowledge of the subject was utterly superficial.... So despite the king's affection for them and despite the fact that he invited them to stay they felt that merely to set foot on Roman territory, even if it meant instant death, was preferable to a life of distinction in Persia. Accordingly they resolved to see the last of barbarian hospitality and all returned home."

4. "Nevertheless they derived from their stay abroad a benefit which was neither slight nor negligible, but which was to secure them peace of mind and contentment for the rest of their days. A clause was inserted in fact in the treaty, which at that time was being concluded between the Romans and the Persians, to the effect that the philosophers should be allowed to return to their homes and to live out their lives in peace without being compelled to alter their traditional religious beliefs.... Chosroes insisted on the inclusion of this point...."

Handwritten notes:
 4. →
 low for
 Commission
 (with arrow pointing to the text above)

The Book of Government or Rules for Kings

The *Siyar al-Muluk* or *Siyasat-nama*
of NIZAM AL-MULK

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HUBERT DARKE

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*On the revolt of Mazdak and the doctrines of his sect;
how Nushirvan The Just destroyed him and his followers*

1 The first person in the world to introduce atheistic doctrines was a man who appeared in the land of Persia: he was a Zoroastrian high priest¹ in the time of King Qubad ibn Firuz and Nushirvan The Just; and his name was Mazdak Bamadadan. He plotted to corrupt the Zoroastrian faith to the disadvantage of its adherents, and spread a new way in the world. Now it so happened that this Mazdak was well versed in astrology, and from the motions of the stars he foretold that in that age a man was to appear who would introduce a religion to cancel the Zoroastrian, Jewish, Christian and idolatrous faiths; this new religion he would impose upon the necks of mankind by miracles and by force, and it would last until the resurrection. Mazdak conceived the vain fancy that he would be this person, and he began to ponder how he should convert the people and propagate a new cult. He knew that in the king's council he enjoyed the utmost respect and the highest estate, while his word was supreme among all the nobles; never had he been heard to utter a vain word — until he laid claim to prophethood. What he did was to tell his minions to make a tunnel in a certain place: they gradually bored a hole so that the end of it came up in the fire-temple, just at the spot where the fire was made: it was only a small opening. Then he began to state his claim to be a prophet, and said, 'I have been sent to renew the faith of Zoroaster because people have forgotten the meaning of the Avesta and Zend, and have ceased to obey the commands of The Good One as Zoroaster laid down; just as in the case of The Sons of Israel when they were disobedient and failed to perform the laws of Moses (upon him be peace) which he received from God in the Torah. He sent a prophet, as promised in the Torah itself, to cast out the disobedience² from The Sons of Israel, to restore the authority of the Torah and bring the people back to the right way. Now I have been sent to renew the faith of Zoroaster and shew people the right way.' These words reached the ears of King Qubad.

2 The next day he called his nobles and priests and held court for the redress of wrongs. He summoned Mazdak and said to him publicly, 'Do you claim to be a prophet?' He said, 'Yes. I have come because our enemies have corrupted the faith which Zoroaster instituted, and cast it into doubt; I will restore it to health. For the most part the people are wrong in their interpretation of the Avesta and Zend; I will shew them the true meaning.' Qubad said, 'What is your [proof of] miracle?' He said, 'My miracle is this, that I will make the fire speak — the fire which you regard as your *gibla*³ and sanctuary; and I will ask God (to Him be power and glory) to command the fire to bear witness to my prophethood, so that the king and everyone with him may hear.' The king said, 'O nobles and priests of Iran, what do you say to these words which Mazdak speaks?' The priests said, 'The first thing is this, that he is calling us to our own faith and book, and he is not opposing Zoroaster. It is true that there are passages in the Avesta and Zend which can bear ten different meanings, and every priest and doctor explains and interprets them differently. It is possible that he may give a better interpretation and more fitting meaning to those passages. But as for his saying that he will give voice to this fire which is the object of our worship — this is a marvel which is not within the power of a man. More than this the king knows best.' Then Qubad said to Mazdak, 'If you make the fire speak I will bear witness that you are a prophet.' Mazdak said, 'Let the king appoint a time when he will come to the fire-temple with his priests and nobles, and at my bidding God (to Him be power and glory) will make the fire speak. If he wills, let it be this very day or this very hour.' Qubad said, 'We propose to come to the fire-temple tomorrow.' The next day Mazdak sent one of his minions into that hole and said, 'Each time that I call upon The Good One with a loud voice, you get beneath the hole and say: Let all worshippers of The Good One in Iranad opt and practise the words of Mazdak; thus they will find prosperity and good fortune in both worlds.'

3 So Qubad and the nobles and priests went to the fire-temple. Mazdak was called; he went and stood beside the fire, and called upon The Good One with a loud voice and blessed Zoroaster, and was silent. From out of the fire there came a voice after the manner we have related, so that the king and all the nobles heard it and were amazed; Qubad had it in mind to believe in Mazdak, and

they returned from the fire-temple. Thereafter Qubad drew Mazdaik daily nearer to himself, until at last he believed in him. He gave him a golden throne inlaid with jewels, and ordered it to be placed on the dais in the audience-hall. At the time of audience Qubad would sit on the dais, and Mazdaik would sit on the throne, and Mazdaik would be much higher than Qubad. Then people began to join Mazdaik's religion, partly out of liking and sympathy, and partly for the sake of agreeing with the king. From various provinces and districts they came to the capital, and either openly or secretly entered Mazdaik's religion. The nobility, the peasantry and the military for the most part had no great zeal for it, but out of respect for the king they dared not say anything; of the priests not one went over to Mazdaik's religion; they said, 'Let us see what [proof] he adduces from the Avesta and Zend.'

4 When Mazdaik saw that the king had embraced his religion and that people from far and near were accepting his invitation, he introduced the subject of property, and said, 'Wealth must be divided among the people, for all are God's slaves and children of Adam. Whosoever people may need, the expense must be met from the communal funds, so that no man suffers neediness and privation in any respect and all men are equal.' After he had convinced Qubad and his other adherents on this point and they had agreed to the sharing of wealth, then he said, 'Your wives are like your other possessions; they too should be regarded as common property. If any man feels desire for a woman let him come together with her. There is no jealousy or intolerance in our religion and nobody is deprived of the pleasures and lusts of the world. The doors of desire and satisfaction are open for everybody.' Then by reason of the sharing of women, people were more eager to adopt his religion, especially the common people. And he laid down the custom that if someone invited twenty men to his house not only would he provide bread and meat and wine and minstrels and other amenities, but all the guests would get up one by one and make use of his wife; and they thought it no wrong. Their custom was that whenever a man went into a room to have commerce with a woman, he put his hat on the door and then went inside. If another person was seized with the same desire, on seeing the hat hanging on the door he turned back, knowing that somebody was already engaged in that business within.

5 Then Nushirvan sent someone secretly to the priests and

said, 'Why do you stay thus silent and helpless? Why do you not say something about Mazdaik and give some advice to my father and ask him why he has embraced this absurdity and been taken in by the deceit of this wicked impostor? Why, has this dog not ruined people's property, ripped the veils from their womenfolk, and made the common people masters of all? Very well, then let him be asked on what authority, at whose bidding he is doing all this. For if you remain silent, your property and your wives will be lost; and dominion and power will depart from our family. Arise and go before my father, and acquaint him of this matter and give him counsel. Then hold argument with Mazdaik and see what proof he can produce.' And to the nobles and important people he sent secret messages saying, 'My father has been overcome by a vicious melancholy, and his wit has been impaired to such an extent that he cannot distinguish between good and evil; please consider how he may be cured. Beware of listening to Mazdaik and acting upon his words; do not be deceived like my father; for this is a vain thing, and vanity does not endure, nor will it profit you in the future.'

6 The nobles were frightened at Nushirvan's words and threats, and although some of them had intended to go over to Mazdaik's religion, because of Nushirvan's words they withdrew, saying, 'Let us see where Mazdaik's affairs lead and what are the grounds for Nushirvan's assertion.' Nushirvan at this time was eighteen years old.

7 Then the priests agreed amongst themselves, and went to Qubad and said, 'From the time of Adam (upon him be peace) until the present we have never read in any history of such injunctions being given as these of Mazdaik, nor have we heard of such things from any of the various prophets which have been in Syria. To us it appears as an abomination.' Qubad said, 'Speak to Mazdaik and see what he says.' They called Mazdaik and said, 'What justification have you for these statements of yours?' Mazdaik said, 'Zoroaster commanded so, and thus it is written in the Avesta and Zend, but men have not known the interpretation thereof. If you do not believe me, ask the fire.' Again they went to the fire-temple and put their question to the fire. From the midst of the fire a voice came out, 'It is indeed as Mazdaik says and not as you say.' Once more the priests returned abashed. The next day they saw Nushirvan and reported the matter. Nushirvan said,

'This MazdaK is succeeding because his religion is the same as the religion of the fire-worshippers in all but two respects.'

8 After a year had passed over these events, one day Qubad and MazdaK were talking; Qubad chanced to say, 'Have people been eager to come over to our religion?' MazdaK said, 'They would have come over one and all if Nushirvan had allowed them; but he has been obstinate and has not accepted the religion.' Qubad said, 'Do you mean that he is not of our faith?' He said, 'No.' Qubad said, 'Call Nushirvan.' Nushirvan was brought. Qubad said, 'Are you not a believer in MazdaK's religion?' He said, 'No, praise be to Allah.' He said, 'Why?' He said, 'Because he is an impostor and a cheat.' He said, 'Wherefore cheat? He makes the fire speak.' Nushirvan said, 'Four things are opposites of one another, and have no colour - water, fire, earth and wind. Let him make water, wind and earth speak as he did the fire, and then I will believe in him.' Qubad said, 'But all that he says comes from interpretation of the Avesta and Zend.' Nushirvan said, 'He who composed the Avesta and Zend did not say that wealth and wives were free to be shared, and in all these years no scholar has produced such an interpretation. Religion exists for the protection of wealth and wives: if these two become free, then what will be the difference between beasts and men, for firs of animals-to-be equal in feeding and coupling, not intelligent human beings.' Qubad said, 'That may be, but why are you opposing me, your father?' He said, 'I have learnt that from you, although it was never the custom before. When I saw you opposing your own father, I too opposed you. If you renounce that, then I will turn back from this.' Qubad and MazdaK in their conversation with Nushirvan eventually reached a point where they said plainly, 'Either you produce evidence to disprove this religion of MazdaK and to refute his arguments, or bring someone whose arguments are stronger and sounder than MazdaK's; otherwise we shall punish you as a warning to others.' Nushirvan said, 'Give me forty days' grace and either I will bring you evidence, or I will bring someone to answer MazdaK.' They said, 'Very well', and thereupon they all parted.

9 Having returned from his father's presence, Nushirvan the very same day sent a messenger with a letter to Pars, to the city of Gul⁴ to a certain aged and wise priest who dwelt there, saying, 'Please come with all speed, for such-and-such has happened between the king, myself and MazdaK.'

10 When the forty days were up Qubad gave audience. He took his seat upon the dais; then MazdaK came and mounted the dais, and sat upon the throne. Qubad ordered Nushirvan to be brought in. MazdaK said to Qubad, 'Ask him what he has found to answer us.' Qubad said, 'Well then what have you found?' Nushirvan said, 'I am making my arrangements.' MazdaK said, 'The time for arrangements has passed; have him punished.' Qubad was silent. MazdaK gave a sign for attendants to seize Nushirvan. When they moved towards him, he laid his hand on the corner⁵ of the portico, and said to his father, 'Why are you in such haste to ruin your own house? The term has not yet expired.' They said, 'How so?' He said, 'I asked for forty days entire, and today is included in the forty until it is over. After that you know best; do whatever you will.' The commanders and priests shouted their assent and said, 'He speaks true; the agreement was for forty days, not forty less one.' Qubad said, 'Let him go for today.' They released him and he escaped from MazdaK's clutches.

11 Qubad then rose and left the audience-hall and the people dispersed; MazdaK returned to his house and likewise Nushirvan. Just then the priest whom Nushirvan had summoned from Pars arrived, mounted on a fast camel. By constant enquiry he reached Nushirvan's palace and dismounted and went straight inside. Softly he said to a servant, 'Go and tell Nushirvan that the priest from Pars has arrived and wishes to see him.' The servant quickly went into the room and told Nushirvan. Nushirvan soon ran out of the room and embraced the priest for joy, and said, 'O priest, imagine that I am just coming back from the other world'; and he told him of all the circumstances. The priest said, 'Do not be anxious, for everything is as you have said, and you are right and MazdaK is wrong. I will give answer to MazdaK as your representative, and I will make Qubad regret what he has done, and bring him back to the [right] road. But now please contrive for me to see Qubad, before MazdaK comes to know that I am here.' He said, 'That is easy; I will arrange for you to see the king tonight in private.' At the time of afternoon prayer Nushirvan went to his father's palace and requested an audience. When he saw his father, he pronounced his eulogy and then said, 'There has arrived from Pars a priest who will give answer to MazdaK, but he has besought me to request the king to hear what he has to say in private tonight, and see his proof; thereafter let the king

order whatever is appropriate.' Qubad said, 'Very well; bring him.'

12 Nushirvan returned, and when it was dark took the priest to his father. The priest blessed Qubad, and praised his forefathers; then he said to the king, 'This Mazdak has fallen into error; this task was not destined for him.' The king said, 'Why?' He said, 'I know him well, and I know the extent of his learning. He knows something about the science of the stars, but about their decrees he is mistaken. There are indications that in the present conjunction a man will appear who will lay claim to prophethood; he will produce a new book, and perform wonderful miracles, and cut the moon into two halves⁶ in the sky; he will call the people to the way of The Good One, and found a holy religion to abolish the Magian religion and all other religions; he will promise paradise and threaten purgatory; he will protect people's property and wives by divine ordinances; he will shun the devil and consort with the angel [Gabriel]; he will destroy fire-temples and idol-temples, and his religion will spread through all the world and will last until the resurrection; heaven and earth will bear testimony to his prophethood. Now this Mazdak has conceived the fancy that he should be this person. But firstly this person will be an Arab; and Mazdak is a Persian. He will prohibit the people from fire-worshipping, and deny Zoroaster: while Mazdak actually follows Zoroaster and prescribes fire-worshipping. He will not allow a man to look at another's wife, nor to take a grain of another's property; for a single unlawful dram he will order hands to be cut off; but Mazdak has made wealth and wives common property. He will receive his orders from heaven, and speak from angelic inspiration: but this man speaks from the fire. He will bring a new book, but Mazdak still follows the Avesta and Zend. No, Mazdak's religion has no foundation. Tomorrow I will disgrace him in front of Your Majesty and prove that he is in error and is only intent on taking the kingship away from your house and wasting your treasure, and making you the equal of every mean fellow.' His words were pleasing and acceptable to Qubad.

13 The next day Qubad came to the audience-hall, and Mazdak sat upon the throne and Nushirvan stood in front of the dais, and the priests and nobles presented themselves. Then the priest from Pars said to Mazdak, 'Will you ask the first question or shall I?'

Mazdak said, 'I will.' The priest said, 'If you want yourself to be the questioner and me to answer, then come here where I am and I will go where you are.' Mazdak was ashamed, and said, 'The king himself seated me here; you ask and I will answer.' The priest said, 'You have instituted community of property; is it not so that those who build inns and bridges and perform good works do so for the sake of reward in the next world?' He said, 'Yes.' He said, 'If wealth is to be shared with everyone else, when people do good works, who will get the reward?' Mazdak was unable to answer. Again he said, 'You make wives common property; suppose twenty men lie with one woman, and the woman becomes pregnant, whose will the child be?' Mazdak failed to reply. Then he said, 'Your purpose is to ruin utterly the pedigrees and possessions of the people. The king sits upon this throne and is our ruler because he is the son of King Firuz and he inherited the throne from his father, just as King Firuz inherited it from his father. If ten different persons lie with the king's wife, then when a child is born, how shall they say whose child it is? Will the line of descent not be broken? When that happens will not the kingship leave this house? High and low rank depend upon riches or poverty; if a man is poor he is out of necessity compelled to enter the service and hire of a rich man; thus high and low rank are manifested. When all property is shared, differences of rank will disappear from the world; the meanest wretch will be equal to the king; in fact kingship will be nullified. You have come to annihilate the wealth and sovereignty of the royal family of Persia.' Mazdak could not say anything; he remained silent. Qubad said, 'Answer him.' He said, 'The answer is that you should instantly order his head to be cut off.' Qubad said, 'A man's head cannot be cut off without proof.' He said, 'I will ask the fire what it commands, for what I say is not from myself.' People had been much distressed for Nushirvan's sake; now they rejoiced that he had escaped death. Mazdak was angry with Qubad, because he had told him to kill the priest and kill Nushirvan, but he had not done so. Mazdak said to himself, 'My followers are now many amongst the peasantry and the army. I must arrange to remove Qubad from the scene; then I will kill Nushirvan and my other opponents.' So they settled that on the following day they would go to the fire-temple and see what the fire ordered; and they dispersed.

14 When night came on, Mazdak called two of his minions and

co-religionists and gave them gifts of money; and he promised to make them both generals. Then he made them swear not to say anything of this to anybody, and he gave them two swords, and said, 'Tomorrow when Qubad comes to the fire-temple with the priests and nobles, if the fire orders Qubad to be killed, you both straightaway draw your swords and kill him. Nobody else of course will come into the fire-temple armed.' They said, 'We obey.' The next day the nobles and priests went to the fire-temple, and Qubad likewise. Now the priest [of Pars] had told Nushirvan, 'Tell ten of your retainers to conceal swords beneath their clothes when they go with you to the fire-temple, in case Mazdak attempts some treachery.' Nushirvan did so, and went to the fire-temple. Whenever Mazdak intended to go to the fire-temple, he instructed his minion beforehand what to say from under the hole. So having told the minion what to say, he himself went to the temple. He said to the priest, 'You ask the fire to speak to you.' The priest put some questions to the fire, but he got no reply. Then Mazdak said to the fire, 'Judge between us, and bear witness that I am right.' From the midst of the fire the voice came, 'Since yesterday I have become weak; first strengthen me with the heart and liver of Qubad, so that I may tell you what to do. Mazdak is your guide to everlasting happiness.' Then Mazdak said, 'Strengthen the fire!' Those two men drew their swords and assaulted Qubad. The priest said to Nushirvan, 'Rescue him!' Nushirvan and his ten men drew their swords, intercepting those two persons and preventing them from striking Qubad; and Mazdak was all the time saying, 'The fire speaks at the bidding of The Good One.' The people then split into two parties: one party said, 'Let us throw Qubad dead or alive into the fire'; others said, 'Let us deliberate upon this until we can see more clearly.' At the close of the day they went back and Qubad was saying, 'Perhaps I have been guilty of some sin for which the fire wishes to use me as food; anyway I would rather be consumed in the fire of this world than in the fire of the next world.'

¹⁵ The next time that the priest was alone with Qubad he spoke about bygone priests and kings, and citing other religions as evidence, he argued that Mazdak was not a prophet, but the enemy of the royal family; the proof of this was that first he had tried to kill Nushirvan; when he was unsuccessful, he attempted to kill him, Qubad; why did he fancy that the fire had spoken; the

fire had never yet uttered a word, so why should it do so then; he would contrive to expose this fraud and shew the king whether it was the fire that spoke or someone else. He so affected the king that he repented of his deeds; but he added, 'Do not treat Nushirvan as a child, because he is in command of the whole world; whatever course he decides upon, do not swerve from it, if you want the throne to remain in your house; and do not reveal your secrets to Mazdak.'

¹⁶ Then the priest said to Nushirvan, 'I want you to try to allure one of Mazdak's closest servants, and tempt him with money to tell us the truth about the fire, so that I may remove all doubts from your father's mind.' Nushirvan induced someone to strike up a friendship with one of Mazdak's minions and by some device to bring the man to him; Nushirvan seated the man in a private place and laid a thousand dinars in front of him, and said, 'I am going to ask you something; if you speak the truth, I will give you these thousand dinars right away; and I will make you one of my intimates and promote you to high rank; if you lie, I will even now remove the head from your body.' The man was afraid and said, 'If I speak the truth, will you keep the promises you have made?' He said, 'Yes, and more.' He said, 'I will tell you.' Nushirvan said, 'Tell me what trick Mazdak has played to make the fire speak to him.' The man said, 'If I tell you this truly, can you protect me and my secret from Mazdak?' He said, 'I can.' He said, 'Know that near the fire-temple there is a piece of ground; Mazdak has bought this and surrounded it on all four sides by a high wall; from there to a point beneath the fire-temple he has driven a tunnel, ending in a small hole which opens into the middle of the fire. He always sends one of his minions into the tunnel, and instructs him to go underneath the fire, put his mouth to the hole and say such-and-such, so that whoever hears will think that it is the fire speaking.' When Nushirvan heard this he knew that the man was speaking the truth. He was glad and gave the man the thousand dinars.

¹⁷ When night came on, he took this man to his father, and made him repeat his words in front of his father. Qubad was amazed at the cunning and audacity of Mazdak; all doubts were completely removed from his mind. Straightway the priest was brought in, and Qubad praised him and they explained everything to him. The priest said, 'I told Your Majesty that he was a fraud.'

Qubad said, 'Now we have found out. What is the best way to, destroy him?' The priest said, 'He certainly must not get to know that you are aware of his deception and have recanted. It is better that you should hold another meeting, and I will dispute with him in front of everybody. In the end I will abandon the contest and confess defeat, and return to Pars. Thereafter you should do whatever Nushirvan sees fit so that this canker may be excised.' After a few days King Qubad commanded the priests and nobles to present themselves, and taking the side of the priest of Pars to dispute with Mazdak and look more closely into his claims.

18 The next day the meeting was held, with Qubad sitting upon the dais, and Mazdak on his throne. Everybody spoke in turn, and the priest of Pars said, 'What amazes me is the fire speaking.' Mazdak said, 'There should not be amazement at the mighty works of God. Do you not remember how Moses (upon him be peace) made a serpent out of a piece of wood, and caused twelve springs of water to flow from one piece of stone?' how he said, "I will drown Pharaoh with all his host", and he did so? God also made the earth obey Moses, so when Moses said, "O earth, swallow up Qarun", it swallowed him up; and Jesus (Allah's prayers be upon him) made the dead alive. All these things are not within the power of man; but they are in the power of God. I too am His apostle and He has made the fire obey me. If you do what I say and what the fire says, you will achieve salvation in both worlds; if you do not obey, you can expect God in His wrath to destroy you all.' The priest of Pars rose to his feet and said, 'I have no answer for a man whose words are from God and from the fire, and whose command the fire obeys; I retire from the contest in the face of one who can do something which I cannot. I am going; I cannot continue my presumption any longer.' So he straightaway departed, and took the road to Pars. Qubad left the audience-hall, and Mazdak went to the fire-temple to do seven days' homage to the fire. The other people returned home, and those persons who had been converted to Mazdak's religion believed in him all the more firmly, and they were delighted.

19 When it was night, Qubad called Nushirvan and said, 'The priest has gone, and he has left me in your hands, because you are capable of putting an end to this religion. Now what are your plans?' Nushirvan said, 'If your Majesty will leave this task to me and not talk about it with anyone but me, I will undertake to

prepare and execute suitable plans, so that all trace of Mazdak and the Mazdakites will be removed from the world.' Qubad said, 'I shall not speak of this matter with anyone but you; the secret will remain with us alone.' Then Nushirvan said, 'Know that the priest of Pars has ostensibly confessed his defeat, and left for Pars, while Mazdak and the Mazdakites are encouraged and emboldened; they say there is nothing to stop them doing whatever they like to us. Now it is easy to kill Mazdak, but his followers are many. If we killed Mazdak, the Mazdakites would flee and disperse throughout the world; they would try to convert the people, and they would occupy mountain strongholds, and give trouble to us and our country. We must arrange matters so that all are destroyed and not one of them escapes from our swords.' Qubad said, 'What do you think is the best method?' Nushirvan said, 'What we should do is this: when Mazdak leaves the fire-temple and comes to see you, you should increase his rank and treat him with even greater respect; then one day when you are talking to him in private, tell him that since the priest of Pars withdrew and confessed defeat, I have become much more tractable; I am repentant and disposed to believe in him. See what he says.'

20 During that week, when Mazdak came to Qubad, Qubad treated him respectfully and humbled himself, and he spoke about Nushirvan in the terms they had agreed. Mazdak said, 'The majority of people look to Nushirvan and hang to his words and deeds. If he comes into this chosen religion, all the world will accept it. I hereby ask the fire to be my intercessor, and I pray The Good One to dispose Nushirvan to this religion.' Qubad said, 'Yes indeed, for he is my heir, and the army and the peasantry love him greatly. When he comes into this religion, the rest of the world will have no excuse. As soon as Nushirvan embraces our religion I swear by The Good One that just as Gushtrasp built a golden kiosk in honour of Zoroaster on top of the cypress at Kishmar, so in your honour I will erect a stone tower in the middle of the Tigris, and place a golden kiosk on top of it, brighter than the sun.' Mazdak said, 'You give him counsel, while I pray: I am confident that The Good One will answer my prayers.'

21 When night came on, Qubad told Nushirvan all that had passed. Nushirvan said, 'After a week let my lord call Mazdak and say: Last night Nushirvan had a dream and he was afraid; in the early morning he came to me and said he had dreamed that a great

fire was attacking him and that he was seeking refuge; a handsome person appeared before him and he asked him what the fire wanted from him; he said the fire was angry with him because he had called it a liar; he asked him how he knew; he said that the angel was aware of all things. Then he woke up. Now he is going to the fire-temple, and is taking much musk and ambergris and aloes-wood to throw on the fire. For three days he is going to do service to the fire and homage to The Good One.' Qubad and Nushirvan said and did these things respectively; Mazdak was very happy.

22 One week after this event, Nushirvan told his father to tell Mazdak that Nushirvan had said to him, 'I am sure now that this religion is right, and that Mazdak is an apostle of The Good One. I would like to follow him, but I am afraid to do so because most of the people are opposed to his religion; we must not let them revolt and seize the country from us by force. I wish I knew how many people had embraced this religion and who they were. If they are many in number and powerful, of course that is good; but if not, I will wait until they gain strength and grow in number, and I will assist them with grants of arms and provisions. Then when we have complete power we will proclaim our religion and force the people to accept it.' [Nushirvan went on to Qubad.] 'If Mazdak says that his followers are many, tell him to make a register and write all their names in it, with the object of shewing it to me for my encouragement so that I may have no excuse for remaining aloof. By this means we shall come to know the number of the Mazdakites and who they are.' Qubad said the prescribed words to Mazdak. Mazdak was happy and said, 'A great many people have embraced this religion.' He said, 'Make a register and write their names in it so that Nushirvan will have no move⁹ left.' Mazdak did so, and brought the register to Qubad. They counted the names; they came to 12,000, comprising townspeople, villagers and soldiers. Qubad said, 'Tonight I will call Nushirvan and present this register to him; if he comes over to our religion, I will instantly cause trumpets and drums to be sounded as a signal, and I will broadcast a rumour that a son has been born to me; when you hear the sound of trumpets and drums, you will know that Nushirvan has accepted our religion.'

23 When Mazdak had gone away and night had come on, Qubad called Nushirvan and shewed him the register, and told him of the signal he had arranged with Mazdak. Nushirvan said,

'Excellent; now have them sound the trumpets and drums, and tomorrow when you see Mazdak tell him that Nushirvan responded favourably and came over to our religion by virtue of his seeing the register and the number of people; tell him also that I said that had there been only 5,000 it would have been enough; since there are 12,000 men, even if the rest of the world were against us, there would be nothing to fear; hereafter whatever plans we make, Your Majesty, Mazdak and myself will all consult together. Then send someone to call me.'

24 When one watch of the night had passed Mazdak heard the sound of trumpets and drums; he rejoiced and said, 'Nushirvan has come over to our religion.' The next day Mazdak went to the audience-hall; Qubad sat on the dais and told Mazdak all that Nushirvan had said; Mazdak was glad. When they left the audience-hall, Qubad and Mazdak sat down in private together, and they sent someone to fetch Nushirvan. Nushirvan arrived and laid a multitude of gold and choice gifts before Mazdak, and scattered pearls as largesse. He apologized for past mistakes, and then they discussed all manner of things. Eventually Nushirvan spoke to his father as follows and they agreed on it: 'You are the lord of the world and Mazdak is the apostle of The Good One. Grant me the command of our people's army, and I will see to it that in all the world there remains nobody who does not belong to our confession and religion; all will willingly and eagerly accept it.' Qubad and Mazdak said, 'Your wish is granted.' Nushirvan said, 'Then the best course of action is for Mazdak to send messengers to all districts and cities and villages to his adherents and tell them that three months hence on a certain day in such-and-such a week everyone from far and near must be present at our palace. From this day until that we shall be making arrangements and preparing necessary weapons and animals for them, but nobody shall know what our business is. On the appointed day we shall spread a feast with enough places for them all to sit down and room for more besides. Having eaten the food they will remove to another hall and there engage in a drinking party in which each person will drink seven cups of wine. Then fifty or twenty at a time we will invest them with robes of honour suited to each man, until all are invested. By nightfall whoever is fully armed, well and good; if anyone is not, they will open the armoury and give out weapons and chain-mail and cuirasses. That same night we shall go forth;

those who accept the religion will be safe; if anybody refuses we shall kill him.' Qubad and Mazdak said, 'There is nothing to add to this.' Having agreed on this they rose. Mazdak sent letters everywhere and warned all people far and near that on such-and-such a day of such-and-such a month they should be present at the court, fully armed and equipped; he told them to be confident, for everything was as they desired and the king was their leader.

25 On the appointed day all the 12,000 men arrived and went to the king's palace. There they saw such a feast prepared as nobody had ever seen before. Qubad sat on the dais, and Mazdak on the throne, while Nushirvan stood with loins girt as if to shew that he was the host. Mazdak could not contain himself for joy. Then Nushirvan seated everyone at the table in order of rank until all were sitting down. When they had finished the food, they moved from this hall to another; there they saw an assembly-room such as their eyes had never beheld before. Qubad and Mazdak again sat on dais and throne and all the guests were made to sit in order as before. Minstrels began to sing and cup-bearers took round the wine. After two rounds about two hundred pages and servants with pieces of brocade and linen wrappings on their arms came in and stood for a time on the edge of the throng. Then Nushirvan announced, 'Take the robes into the other hall, for it is crowded here; the guests will be taken there by twenties and thirties and have their robes put on; then they will pass from that hall to the polo-field, and wait there until all are robed. When all have been invested, the king and Mazdak will come on to the polo-field and cast an eye upon them and inspect them. Meanwhile I will have the armoury opened and weapons brought.' Now on the previous day Nushirvan had sent someone out into the villages and summoned two or three hundred casual labourers to come with spades, for the ostensible purpose of sweeping the palace and grounds and clearing away dirt and rubbish. When the men came from the villages he mustered them all on the polo-field and shut the gate tight. Then he said to them, 'During today and tonight I want you to dig 12,000 pits in this field, each one a yard and a half deep, and keep the spoil at the side of the pits.' He ordered the watchmen to detain them all in a certain yard when they had finished digging the pits and prevent any of them from going out. On the night [of the feast] he armed about four hundred men and stationed them on the polo-field and in a yard by the field and

instructed them as follows. 'Take each party of twenty of thirty men as I send them from the assembly-room to the [robing]-hall, and lead them from there into the yard and from the yard on to the field; strip them all naked and put them head first into the pits up to the navel with their legs in the air; shovel back the earth all around them and tread it down so that they are firmly planted in the pits.'

26 After the robe-bearers had gone from the assembly-room into the [robing]-hall, they brought in two hundred horses with gold and silver trappings, as well as shields and sword-belts. Nushirvan had them taken into the [robing]-hall. Then he picked the people in twenties and thirties, and sent them into the hall. From there they were taken through the yard on to the polo-field and put head-downwards into the pits, which were then filled with earth. Thus they destroyed them all. Then Nushirvan said to his father and Mazdak, 'They have all been invested with their robes and are standing ready on the polo-field. Come and inspect them for you have never seen such fine attire.' Qubad and Mazdak arose and went through the [robing]-hall and the yard on to the field. As far as he could see from end to end of the field Mazdak saw nothing but legs sticking up in the air. Nushirvan turned to Mazdak and said, 'For an army of which you are the commander what better kind of investiture could there be than this? You came only to despoil the people's property and wives, and take the kingship from our family?' They had made a high mound in front of the field and dug a pit in it. At Nushirvan's command they arrested Mazdak, took him on to the mound and placed him up to his chest in that pit, with his head outside and his feet inside. Then they poured plaster all round him so that he remained set in the plaster. Nushirvan said, 'Now look at your believers! gaze upon them!' and to his father he said, 'Behold the wisdom of the wise! The best thing for you now is to remain awhile indoors until the people and the army calm down, for this trouble arose through your weak-mindedness.' So he kept his father indoors. On his order the villagers who had been brought for digging the pits were released, and the gates of the polo-field opened for citizens and soldiers to see the sight, and they plucked Mazdak's beard and moustaches until he died. Then Nushirvan held his father in captivity, and having summoned all the nobility, he ascended the throne as undisputed sovereign, and began that