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ANTONIO PANAINO

ABĒBĪM “Fearless”

Who Was Afraid of the End
of the Millennium?
New Approaches to the Interpretation
of the Traditional Date of Zoroaster

with contributions by
Domenico Agostini, Jeffrey Kotyk, Paolo
Ognibene, and Alessia Zubani

A Research Volume edited by Alessia Zubani

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Dedicated to Frantz Grenet as a gift of friendship and esteem

Il mondo è pieno di errori, e prima cura dell'uomo deve essere quella di conoscere il vero. Una gran parte delle verità, che i filosofi hanno dovuto stabilire, sarebbe inutile se l'errore non esistesse; un'altra parte delle medesime è resa tuttora inutile per molti degli errori che in effetto sussistono. Quante tra esse, che trovano degli ostacoli insuperabili negli errori che ne hanno occupato il luogo! quante, che facilmente potrebbero apprendersi e sono difficilissime a conoscersi per gli errori che impediscono di ravvisarle! È ben più facile insegnare una verità, che stabilirla sopra le rovine di un errore; è ben più facile l'aggiungere che il sostituire. Egli è pur deplorabile che l'uomo, che ha sì breve vita, debba impiegarne, nel disfarsi degli errori che ha concepiti, una parte maggiore di quella che gli rimane per andare in traccia del vero. Tutti convengono che fa d'uopo rinunciare ai pregiudizi, ma pochi sanno conoscerli, pochissimi sanno liberarsene, e quasi nessuno pensa a recidere il male dalla radice.

*[The world is full of errors, and man's first concern must be to know the truth. A large part of the truths, which the philosophers had to establish, would be useless if the error did not exist; another part of the same truths is still made useless for many of the errors that actually exist. How many among them, who find insuperable obstacles in the errors that have occupied their place! How many, which could easily be learned and are very difficult to know due to the errors that prevent them from being recognized! It is far easier to teach a truth than to establish it on the ruins of an error; it is much easier to add than to replace. It is also deplorable that man, who has such a short life, must employ, in discarding the errors he has conceived, a greater part of what is left to him in order to trace the truth. Everyone agrees that it is necessary to renounce prejudices, but few know how to know them, very few know how to get rid of them, and hardly anyone thinks of cutting evil from
the root.]*

Giacomo Leopardi, from the incipit of the Saggio sopra gli Errori degli Antichi, Chapter I, Idea dell'opera, 1815.

PREFACE

The origin of this booklet is due to an unexpected event. Around the end of the year 2020 I was asked by Prof. Adriano Rossi to read and prepare for a posthumous publication the last article left by my master Prof. Gherardo Gnoli.¹ Thanks to this opportunity I had the chance to re-think some problems connected with the genesis of the religious and political myth of the Mazdean fear of the end of the millennium. This doctrine, according to Mas'ūdī, would justify the crude reduction of the Parthian Era.

The study of this matter opened to me some new perspectives, which I entered after a long meditation. The readers will see that the present investigation not only shows that this tradition could not have been foundational for the Sasanian dynastic ideology, but that it was invented only in later times, in the framework of a depressive and apocalyptic dimension that was due to the fall of the Sasanian monarchy. Actually, the main problem lies in the radical displacement of the expected time of the era of Zoroaster (which in any case remained in a direct pseudo-synchronic connection with the semi-mythic Kayāniān epic and the real, but no more well known, history of the Achaemenian dynasty) and the Seleucid Era.

1 See Gnoli 2021. For a historiographical presentation and discussion of the approach to the date of Zoroaster within the scholarly activity of Gherardo Gnoli, see Panaino 2019c.

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Around this preposterous synchronism, which put Alexander’s time close to the beginning of the Christian era, the Persians created an invented, teleological and foundational chronology, which anchored Zoroaster in history as the pivot of the future millennium, thus removing the prophet from an ancestral realm of an undetermined and remote antiquity. As a religious and teleological chronology, this computation of time was not meant for external observers, but mainly for inner ideological purposes. Thus, it did not interfere or exclude the knowledge of other, more precise (from the point of view of profane history), dynastic synchronisms and chronologies, because their usage belongs to different frameworks. What happened later, in the Islamic period, reflects a different orientation, in which an apocalyptic frame created a link between the collapse of the Achaemenian and that of the Sasanian Empire, underpinning an apocalyptic idea of the inevitable catastrophic end of the millennium. This “category” does not belong to the pillars underpinning the original Zoroastrian idea of time, and the alleged assumption that a secret dimidiation of the future time would have been secretly attempted by Ardašir I (or other kings) in order to postpone the (too soon) expected end of the millennium is explicitly in contradiction with the Zoroastrian vision of the temporal battle against Ahreman and his demonic army.

In this research I have taken a direction, which brings me very far from the results suggested by my dearest masters, Gherardo Gnoli and Ilya Gershevitch in particular, but this separation is not recent, because it was clear already during the redaction of Gnoli’s *Zoroaster and History* (2000). I do not deny that some of their suggestions are still deep and important, and that their contribution remains invaluable in many respects, but, as I will argue in this study, the assumption according to which the 258 years between Zoroaster and Alexander consti-

tute a reliable historical dating cannot at all be taken for granted. In writing this I have neither pleasure, nor particular satisfaction, but I simply think that the cultural operation made with the synchronism between the era of Zoroaster and the Seleucid one had a special theological and political meaning, removing Zoroaster from an uncertain mythical past, and hammering his central role in human history (at least for the Iranians) in a real time. This was an ideological and chronological operation decided and established within the intellectual and theological framework of a strictly Persian Mazdean club, and reflects the Persian way of writing the religious history of the Iranian identity. This operation was based on a reinterpretation of the transcendent value assumed by the model proposed with the Seleucid era. Actually, this system did not assign any importance to single events of current history, and it was detached from the inevitable cycle of death/enthronement of the single kings. It determined an abstract time in which the starting point was attributed to a certain moment in Zoroaster's life. This point of anchoring, through which mythological Mazdean history entered secular world history, was the fruit of a mature decision, probably deliberated within the framework of the Sasanian elites. Thus, the Seleucid era became a general model of imitation, which inspired the Parthians and other Iranian dynasties, the kings of Pontus and Bithynia, the era of Diocletian, or the Jewish era of the Creation and the Christian *anno domini* as well, as again Kosmin² remarks. The era of Zoroaster enters in this process, but it shows the effects of an appropriation, in which the history of Zoroaster and his millennium is framed within the perspective of an historical role to be assumed by the Sasanian dynasty. For this reason, we can rightly suspect that the Parthian Mazdean priest-

2 Kosmin 2014: 101.

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ly colleges or the Sogdian and more generally eastern Iranian ones would have not necessarily shared (and presumably did not share) *this presentation* of the ancestral Zoroastrian history and the chronology of Zoroaster as given, for instance, in the *Bundahišn*.

Anyway, as I explicitly stated in the present work, a complete treatment of the subject of the date of the Iranian prophet was not my main concern. On the contrary, I was much more interested in the reason behind the synchronism between the era of Zoroaster and the beginning of the Seleucid Era, and the idea of the apocalyptic fear of the end of the millennium. It is for this reason that in this study I will not discuss the subject of the “true” chronology of the prophet, his historicity or lack thereof, matters with which I have dealt in other works,³ in which I have tried to maintain a balanced posi-

3 See, e.g., Panaino 2004a, *passim*. I summarize here my points of view on this matter. There is no ground in order to demonstrate or deny *a priori* the existence of Zoroaster, as a historical personality, and his relative historical chronology. His biography is simply beyond any serious possibility of reconstruction, or one risks entering into a field more similar to that of a fantasy novel. A different problem is that of the role played (or not) by an individual priest, named Zaratuštra, in the composition of the *Gāthās* (in their totality or in part) and in the reshaping of an earlier theological framework. If the hypothesis suggesting the absence of any personal role and, then, the inevitable reduction of Zoroaster to a foundational myth has any objective grounds, we must simply consider that within the Vedic world no individual priest was given such prestige and prominence as the Iranian prophet. This is evidence (and a difference) that we cannot easily forget, although without overestimating its importance. Also, the attempt to invoke the role of a priestly group, which would have created the myth of Zoroaster is insufficient. In fact, if their action was connected with a change in ritual and cosmology, this circle itself would play the role of the prophet and, then, its function would be that of “Zoroaster”. If we enter into a circular discussion without new sources, the battle around this subject would be eternal, like the one

tion without dogmatic statements. For the same reason, I will not discuss in detail problems such as those emerging from the figures 6,000 or 600 attested in the Greek tradition, if not in connection with the chiliad doctrine. I hope to convince a younger scholar in the near future to write a historiographical work covering the history of the whole debate about this subject, which has now assumed an impressive size, and whose treatment, starting with Anquetil Duperron⁴ or the discovery of the traditional date by Floigl⁵ (and its reception in earlier studies),⁶ would be worth a huge critical volume. Despite the fact that nowadays the subject is no more popular and

that Ohrmazd tried to avoid when creating the limited time and the earthly dimension. What we really know is so vague from the proper historical point of view that we cannot use it for a serious reconstruction, and we must resign to work with this open problem. Certainly, this fact does not allow us to consider the so-called traditional date of Zoroaster, with its 258 years before Alexander, a landmark linking his epoch to the starting point of the Seleucid era (312/11 BCE), as a true historical figure. My interest in it is due to the cosmological and political meaning it involved within the framework of history in late antiquity, not certainly for the redetermination of the true period of Zoroaster's life, despite the fact that he was a true person, or simply an invented founder of a new religion. Recently, Drews (2017) has reopened the debate about the historical existence of the Buddha with a number of critical remarks, which can be methodologically instructive also for Mazdean studies.

4 Anquetil-Duperron 1771: I, II: 60-61.

5 See Floigl 1881: 17-18; the historical importance of this study was underlined by Kellens 2002: 19.

6 See, e.g., West 1898: XXVII-XLVII; Jackson 1899; Bartholomae 1924; Hertel 1924a; cf. also another important work, usually forgotten, such as that by Charpentier 1923-25, which firstly appeared in the form of an extended review of Hertel 1924a, and then was soon followed by a small monograph in 1926-27. Many other pertinent studies have been briefly mentioned in Kellens 2001 and 2002 as well as in Gnoli 2000 (and many other of his studies about the date of Zoroaster).

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relevant, and that the high level of controversial discussions, based on many technicalities interpreted in a more or less radical and *a priori* way, has kept many scholars at a distance, frightened by a very high degree of aggressivity in the framework of the academic controversy,⁷ a calm resumption of the question can perhaps be rethought. Then, in this work, I will simply try to present some new points of view with the desire to focus on some peculiar aspects of the subject, which seem to have escaped common observation.

The discussion of the Mazdean chronology inevitably involves the traditional Iranian national history, and what has been defined by Ehsan Yarshater⁸ as a “strange national amnesia”, a concept that Gregor Schoeler⁹ has carefully revised through the lens of the theory developed by Jan Vansina¹⁰ on the footsteps of Maurice Halbwachs¹¹ (and in recent times developed by Jan Assmann)¹² about the gaps in the perception and preservation of the past. I have used these models without a dogmatic approach, thus taking into due consideration some prudent *caveats*, which I owe to the kindness of my dear friend Jens Brockmeier (Paris). Furthermore, I have introduced some additional *caveats* concerning the fact that the construction and presentation of an Iranian national history strongly connected with the Mazdean identity has been a political and cultural operation decided in the framework of Persian political and religious elites, and that their sacred history was not necessarily “historically founded”,

7 The polemical level of the controversy can be “tasted” in the defense of Henning’s thesis (1951) by Gershevitch (1995) and Gnoli (2000, etc.) and in the antagonist answer given by Kellens 2002; 2003.

8 Yarshater 2006: 305.

9 Schoeler 2020.

10 Vansina 1985.

11 Halbwachs 1950.

12 See Assmann 2005; 2008. Cf. again Schoeler 2020: 511, 525–528.

because its rationale followed other criteria, whose pivot was in a dynastic teleology, not in a correct preservation of the facts and their exact recording. Zoroaster himself was part of an ideological game absolutely foundational for the Sasanians and their leadership, but this comprehensible target was not necessarily shared with other Iranian peoples, such as the defeated Parthians, the Sogdians, the Bactrians, etc. While Zoroastrianism was the common religion of many Iranian ethnic groups in late antiquity, and although it was declined in different forms, its political use (a matter in which the position of Zoroaster assumed a central meaning) did not reflect or correspond to common interests. In this respect, the whole debate about the date of Zoroaster does not take into consideration the forgotten evidence that different local forms of Zoroastrianism might produce different historical, para-historical or even pseudo-historical solutions. For this reason, what can be considered as amnesia was simply another way of presenting the most important steps of a nation, but according to a precise, and unilateral, point of view.

I must thank for their progressive involvement in this project of research two of my direct pupils and friends, namely Paolo Ognibene (Alma Mater Studiorum, University of Bologna), and Alessia Zubani (LabEx Hastec, École Pratique des Hautes Études-PSL), who have kindly agreed to contribute to this text with individual chapters of their own, thus enriching the level of the discussion and enlarging its perspectives: Alessia Zubani with a study on Mas'ūdī's discussion on the chronology of the Arsacid kings; Paolo Ognibene with an overview about the Russian debate during the Soviet period on the date of Zoroaster. Last but not least, Jeffrey Kotyk (University of British Columbia, Canada) agreed to write an additional chapter about some earlier Chinese sources on the Persian calendar. He is now joining my team in our

department in Ravenna as a new research fellow in the framework of an EU Marie Skłodowska-Curie Project, entitled “Sino-Iranica: Investigating Relations Between Medieval China and Sassanian Iran.”

I have enjoyed an enormous benefit from a large number of rich comments, which Prof. Joseph Wiesehöfer (Christian-Albrechts-Universität zu Kiel) and Dr. Gianfilippo Terribili (University “La Sapienza” di Roma) kindly sent me during the preparation of this study. I have frequently referred to them in the notes, and for this reason I want to express to them my gratitude for their invaluable help and support. Giusto Traina (Université Paris-Sorbonne, Paris IV) kindly gave me some pieces of information about the Armenian calendrical tradition. I am deeply grateful also to my colleague and friend Almut Hintze (SOAS, University of London), who agreed to read this study with a number of precious comments and remarks. Dr. Andrea Gariboldi (University of Trieste) discussed with me some problems connected with the gold coins of Husraw I and II. I must also thank Prof. Domenico Agostini (Tel Aviv University), who has supported our project with a number of important remarks and suggestions, and with a special contribution dedicated to chapter XV of the *Ayādgār ī Jāmāspīg*.

With pleasure I would like to mention the strong support I received from the librarians of the University Campus of the Alma Mater Studiorum in Ravenna in the redaction of this and other studies. The University Library of my campus, despite the pandemics, offered enormous and indispensable support in the acquisition of rare articles and texts in Italy and abroad with speediness and high professional competence. Thanks to them all very much indeed.

I take also the opportunity to thank again Dr. Jeffrey Kotyk, who in a few months will move to Ravenna from

Preface

Canada, for his precious advice and support during the redaction of this volume, particularly in the final presentation of its definitive version. I must also thank Dr. Lorenzo Paoletti (University of Köln), who kindly offered some useful comments to the present work.

The dedication of the present volume to my friend Frantz Grenet is just a humble manifestation of admiration and respect for one of the greatest Iranologists, and a *munus amicitiae* that wants to refresh a common memory of some beautiful moments in Samarkand and Central Asia.

The editorial care of the present volume, and its coordination, has been followed in all steps of its development by Alessia Zubani, whom I deeply thank for her precious collaboration and willingness in assuming this responsibility.

I hope that this investigation might improve the discussion and facilitate some focus on some new problems, which deserve our closer attention.

Antonio Panaino

Ravenna, 2022



Antonio Panaino

ABĒBĪM “FEARLESS”
Who Was Afraid of the End of the Millennium?
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of the Traditional Date of Zoroaster

1. Introductory Summary

When the booklet was ready, one of the colleagues who kindly accepted to read it before the final publication rightly suggested the redaction of a summary in order to facilitate an approach to the intricacies of the numerous and different arguments collected in this study. As frequently happens, new ideas emerged during the present research or some inspiring suggestions were given by those who wrote some additional chapters to the work or who have contributed with some insightful remarks. The matter treated here involves not only chronological problems, but historical, theological and concurrent numerical data and interpretations, which in their turn were transferred in different periods and languages with the additional difficulty that at every step we are confronted with trenches and walls, with traps and other difficulties of an unpredictable nature. Last but not least, the whole subject has been and really is a battlefield, where contrasting orientations have struggled for more than two centuries. For these reasons, I will try to summarize here the main points of this study and the inferences we can deduce from it.

An important Arabic source transmitted by Masʿūdī states that king Ardašīr I would have assumed a secret political act through which the whole length of the Parthian era was radically reduced. He would have taken this deci-

sion in order to avoid a situation in which the end of the millennium starting with a central moment in the life of Zoroaster (implicitly an era of Zoroaster) might fall in a period too close to the beginning of the Persian kingdom. In the course of this research, I will argue that this statement corresponds to a later invention, created after the fall of Sasanian Empire, in a dimension of depression and defeat stemming from the definitive installation of Islamic rule. It is implausible that the early Sasanians would have introduced such a pessimistic doctrine concerning their own fall in a period in which they started to build up the pillars of their imperial domination. Furthermore, the hypothesis of a deliberate cut of the passed time in order to delay the due course of time goes against the basic principles of the Mazdean conception of time, in which the slowing down of time's arrow is a demonic act. Actually, only Ahreman would be interested in delaying the end of the 12,000-years millennial cycle, because with its term, his defeat would also be inevitably marked.

These considerations imposed a revision of the date of Zoroaster from a new and different point of view and some figure connected with it. For this reason, the standard figure of 258 years before Alexander and its meaning became again an important matter of investigation. First, in this study, the reader will find a collection of arguments showing that it is impossible to presume, as some scholars did, that the Persians ignored the Seleucid era in itself, but also the true nature of the era of Zoroaster, and its direct connections with the Seleucid era. In fact, if, as usual, one starts to calculate backwards the alleged period of Zoroaster putting 258 years before one important moment in the life of Alexander, such as his death, or the death of Darius III or the invasion of Persia, etc., we must observe that the Persians, who established a clear synchronism between the Seleucid era (in its different versions and names) and the era of Zoroaster, had an idea

which was radically different. Actually, they put the acme of Zoroaster’s life in correspondence with the beginning of the SE, i.e. 312/311 BCE, so that Alexander became a sort of demonic player whose life was framed in the 1st century BCE. This fact can better explain why Alexander was credited as a “Christian” in the later Pahlavi sources. But if the Persians created such a peculiar tradition, there was a good reason for it. Their intention was not that of cutting the right chronology out of a dramatic fear of the future, but it was because they had a strong theological and political determination in erasing the negative memory of the past Iranian defeat by the Greeks and Alexander, placing the acme of their prophet along a chronological scheme in which it was the starting moment of the new millennium. Thus, the new Zoroastrian era canceled Alexander, whose life was displaced by 258 years onwards, and fixed a period of victories in the name of the Sasanian dynasty. This artificial and ideological creation was probably fruit of a vision of time strongly rooted in millennial projections and in astrological categories (among which probably the doctrine of the Saturn / Jupiter conjunctions was remarkably important). Its development was reasonably favored by other chronological schemes in which the Seleucid era was meaningless, as in the case of the *Chronicle of Nabonassar*, which was well known even in Persia, thanks to the introduction of the *Almagest*, a work probably translated, at least in part, and where such a *Chronicle* was usually given *in extenso* and referred to for calculations.

This artificial operation did not imply that the Persians really ignored the existence of other chronologies, such as those of the Seleucids, Parthians, etc., but simply that they promoted their own self-representation into future history, as a teleological marker or an emblem of their definitive future triumph. This operation was properly Persian and Mazdean, according to the theology

developed by a leading circle within the Sasanian clergy and the royal family, yet we have no arguments underpinning the thesis that this chronological model was of early Zoroastrian derivation, or that Sogdian, Parthian, and other Zoroastrian clerical communities belonging to the rich variety of ethnic traditions in Iran would have accepted it as true. The Parthians would have probably never followed this scheme.

This and other facts show that the arrangement of the Zoroastrian chronology around a millennium, initiated by Zoroaster's acme and marked by the (anachronistic) arrival of Alexander, was foundational within a political project that presupposed the millennial success of the Persians until the final victory, a victory as much political as it should be religious and eschatological. For this reason, fear of future events was not at all the marker of the Sasanian Zoroastrian construction of historical time. The Mazdean millennium of Zoroaster was imagined as part of the three final chiliadic periods, in which there was no special room for apocalyptic expectations. These emerged with the defeat, as a progressive impulse in favor of a new and more positive attitude, suggesting a hope in the apokatastasis and a final regeneration of the whole of humanity being freed from sins and hell. The presence of contrasting visions and doctrines with the Zoroastrian theological schools generated contradictory expectations, and paved the way for negative myths, such as those connected to a fear of the future, whose roots do not belong to the atmosphere blowing on the up-raised *drafš* of the early Sasanian forces, but to the sense of humiliation and despair of a later historical phase. In the framework of a reevaluation of the Persian "amnesia", i.e. the problem concerning the oblivion in which apparently the history of past Western Iranian dynasties, such as the Medes and Persians, fell down, but also that of the Parthians, cannot be only explained in terms of am-

nostic processes inevitable in oral transmission. On the contrary, some of these phenomena partly reflect a deliberate selection made by a political and religious circle underpinning the teleological and imperial program of a new dynasty, such as the Sasanian one, which decided to frame the borders of a millennial project under the protection of Zoroaster. Although this choice marked the history of Zoroastrianism in late antiquity, the seal of this narration did not compellingly represent all the Zoroastrian traditions, which probably had different chronologies and mythological settings. Thus, the traditional date of Zoroaster corresponds to a particular vision of history, in which the determination of the past was foundational for the pre-vision of the future, a future centered on Persia, the Sasanians and their clergy. We have no reason to assume that this important “tradition” was ancient and rooted into the ancestral folklore of the other Iranian and Zoroastrian tribes.

2. Mas‘ūdī and the Alleged Secret of Ardašīr.

As previously stated, in this contribution I would like to start calling again readers’ attention just to one apparently minor (or “lateral”) chronological problem, although very important in itself, and which has been frequently debated in the framework of an exhausting discussion strictly connected with the quest for the “traditional date of Zoroaster”.¹ For this reason, my fo-

1 As previously explained, in this study I do not intend to enter the whole question of the date of Zoroaster and its implications, and for the general bibliography I will invite the reader to refer to the books of Gnoli 2000 and Kellens 2001, 2002, plus some additional studies which appeared in the following years. They are partly quoted in the present work when necessary.

cus on the interpretation of the intriguing figure of 258 years, and the connected determination of the date of Zoroaster, will remain to a certain extent limited, and I will enter this crucial matter only when necessary, particularly in some introductory sections, but without any attempt at proposing a detailed new interpretation of all the aspects of this tradition. Here, on the contrary, I would like to discuss the meaning of the so-called shortage of the Parthian era according to some Byzantine, Islamic and Zoroastrian sources.

One argument used, refused and/or abused throughout more than one century of polemical discussions concerns a very peculiar piece of news narrated by Mas'ūdī, an Arab geographer of the 10th century, about Sasanian chronology. In his *Kitāb at-tanbih wa'l-išrāf*, or *The Book of Admonition and Revision*,² he stated that the Persians of the Sasanian period would have been deeply worried by the approaching end of the millennium. This deadline, considered as dreadful and fatal for their dynasty, would have been addressed by Ardašīr I by means of various secret attempts aiming at a radical reduction of the missing time span theoretically expected before the conclusion of that chronological period. For instance, one of the practical consequences, due to this calculation, would have produced a sharp shortage of the length previously attributed to the Arsacid historical phase. Mas'ūdī was very clear on this fact, declaring that this solution was the deliberate result of a pious fake, whose occurrence was known only by few *mōbads*.

2 See the edition of the Arabic text by de Goeje 1894 (vol. VIII): 89-98, and the French translation by Carra de Vaux 1896: 140-142; Spiegel 1878: 193 quoted in note a previous French translation by Silvestre de Sacy (1810: 161-163). Cf. also Klíma 1959: 560-561; Messina 1933: 51-53. See now also the new English translation by Hoyland 2018: 93-94. Cf. Shahbazi 2002: 27-28. About this source, see here the special chapter by A. Zubani.

Before any further discussion, it would be more appropriate to read the Arabic text in the usually quoted French version of Carra de Vaux:

Il y a entre les Perses et les autres nations, dans la manière d'établir la chronologie d'Alexandre, une grande différence que bien des gens ont négligé d'élucider ; elle tient à un secret qui est pour les Perses secret de religion et d'état et que connaissent seuls les mobeds et les hirbeds, ainsi que les lettrés et les érudits, comme nous avons pu le constater dans les contrées de Fars et de Karmanie et dans d'autres contrées habitées par des peuples non arabes. On ne le trouve consigné dans aucun des ouvrages qui traitent de l'histoire perse, ni dans aucun livre d'histoires ou de biographies. Il consiste en ce que Zéradoucht (Zoroastre) fils de Bourchasb fils d'Esbiman a dit dans l'Avesta, c'est-à-dire dans le livre qui lui a été révélé, selon eux, que l'empire des Perses serait ébranlé au bout de trois cents ans et que leur religion subsisterait ; mais que, à l'expiration de la millième année, leur empire et leur religion seraient ruinés ensemble. Or il s'écoula entre Zoroastre et Alexandre environ trois cents ans ; en effet Zoroastre parut sous le règne de Keïbichtasb fils de Keïlohrasb, d'après ce que nous avons dit plus haut, et Ardéchir fils de Babek refit l'unité de l'empire et domina toutes les satrapies un peu plus de cinq cent dix ans après Alexandre. Il observa que le temps qui restait à courir jusqu'à l'accomplissement du millénaire était d'environ deux cents ans. Il voulut donc prolonger la durée de l'empire de deux cents autres années, dans la crainte où il était qu'après deux cents ans écoulés les sujets de l'empire ne cessassent de le soutenir et de le défendre, conformément à la parole de leur prophète qui avait prédit sa ruine. Alors il retrancha des cinq cent dix années et plus qui le séparaient d'Alexandre, environ la moitié de ce temps. Il continua à mentionner les rois des satrapies qui avaient vécu dans la moitié conservée, et il supprima les autres. Il fit ensuite publier dans le royaume que l'année où il avait paru, et où il avait soumis les rois des satrapies et tué Ardawân

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qui possédait la plus grande puissance et l'armée la plus forte, était la deux cent soixantième depuis Alexandre. Il fonda là-dessus sa chronologie, qui se répandit parmi les hommes. Telle est l'explication du désaccord qui existe entre les Perses et les autres peuples et du trouble de la chronologie, dans la période des rois des satrapies.

Ardéchir fils de Babek rappelle ce fait à la fin du testament qu'il a adressé aux rois ses descendants et ses successeurs dans le gouvernement de la religion et de l'empire. Il dit : « Si je n'étais certain que la ruine de l'empire doit arriver à l'expiration des mille années, je croirais vous laisser dans mon testament un moyen capable, si vous vous en serviez, d'assurer votre perpétuité aussi longtemps qu'il y aura un jour et une nuit ; mais lorsque le jour de votre perte sera venu, vous aurez déjà suivi vos passions et abandonné les préceptes de votre loi, vous aurez donné parmi vous le pouvoir aux méchants et abaissé les bons ».

Le même fait est mentionné par Tanchar, *Mobed* d'Ardéchir, qui avait invité les peuples à reconnaître ce prince et publié son avènement à l'empire, à la fin de son épître à Mâdjouchnas, maître des régions montagneuses de Debâwend, Bey, Tabaristan, Deïlem et Djîlân. « Si nous ne savions, dit-il, que la ruine doit survenir à l'expiration des mille années, nous dirions que le roi des rois a restauré l'autorité pour toujours ; mais nous savons que la ruine surviendra à l'expiration des mille années et qu'elle aura pour cause le mépris de l'autorité royale, la libération de ce qui était captif et la captivité de ce qui était libre. Voilà la ruine contre laquelle il n'y a pas de recours. Pour nous, bien que nous soyons de ceux qui sont condamnés à périr, nous devons travailler au salut de l'empire et faire dans ce but tous nos efforts jusqu'à ce que la ruine soit complète. Sois donc de ces-hommes de salut, et n'aide pas la ruine à faire son œuvre sur toi et ton peuple ; elle a assez de force par elle-même sans qu'on l'aide ; tu as plutôt besoin de te procurer ce qui peut être utile à ton honneur dans la demeure de la ruine ou à ta subsistance dans la demeure du salut. Nous prions Dieu qu'il te place dans celle-ci au siège le plus haut et au degré le plus élevé ».



3. A Preliminary Critical Discussion of the Arabic Source.

Many modern scholars, also among those who have rejected the historicity of Mas‘ūdī’s explanation concerning what Hildegard Lewy³ designated as the “faulty Persian chronology”, did not question in principle the soundness and the rationale of a doctrine eventually concerning the fatal end of the millennium, and usually accepted it as a foregone conclusion.⁴ In some cases, they just refused to accept this theory as the true motivation, but there was no special discussion about its relevance or irrelevance within Zoroastrianism. For this reason, its existence and suitability were basically considered as perfectly plausible even within the framework of the Zoroastrian cosmology, and they uncritically accepted it as beyond any reasonable doubt.⁵ As we have read,

3 See H. Lewy 1944, *passim*.

4 For instance, Spiegel (1878: 192-193) seems to assume that the end of a millennium should have been always considered an unsure and difficult moment, while the attitude of Silvestre de Sacy (1810: 163) was more prudent on the subject. Gnoli (1971: 234-237) accepted as good this statement; later he rejected (Gnoli 2000) this interpretation (as in his posthumous study, in the press). Note that also Henning (1951: 37-38), Lewy (1941: 62) and Taqizadeh (1947: 38-39), rejected Mas‘ūdī’s report, but no one among them criticized the rationale underpinning that theory. Cf. also Herzfeld 1947, I: 13-14, *passim*. Messina (1933: 51) considered historical the attribution to Ardašīr of this stratagem. See also the discussion in Shahbazi 2002: 17.

5 The presence of a similar statement concerning the “fault” chronology was known also by al-Bīrūnī, although this attestation is not *per se* compellingly relevant, because the Choresmian scholar seems to have derived it from Mas‘ūdī himself. This reference is attested exactly in the *Qānūn al-Mas‘ūdī* (see Taqizadeh 1937b: 139) and its reception does not offer an independent supportive contribution to it, because any enthusiastic invocation to al-Bīrūnī’s piece of news is nothing but a circular argument. On this problem, see the different approach by Herzfeld 1947, I: 9-10, *passim*.



Mas'ūdī affirmed that the Persian aristocracies of early Sasanian times (kingship, priests, and nobles) had been strictly keeping a secret concerning the (alleged) devastating consequences of a dramatic apocalyptic scenario foreseen in the approaching turn of the millennium, and it was for this reason that they would have shortened the historical period corresponding to the Arsacid era.

Before continuing, it is necessary to analyze in a careful way the soundness of the content of this Arabic document. Very peculiarly, on the one hand, Mas'ūdī stated that the “secret” was not mentioned in any book of Persian history or in accessible texts concerning general histories or biographies,⁶ but that it was orally preserved by few Mazdean priests, while, on the other hand, he declared that the reasons of the secret were well preserved within texts such as the *Testament of Ardašīr*,⁷ and *The Letter of Tansar*.⁸ Apart from the intrinsic contradiction of this statement, we can simply note that these are later textual compositions, probably containing late Sasanian material, but certainly not genuine 3rd century CE original Pahlavi documents. The reference to these Arabic texts is in any case very important, and in particular those to *The Letter of Tansar* and *The Testament of Ardašīr*, because of their semi-historical and literary nature. As suggested by Grignaschi,⁹ *The Testament of Ardašīr* represents the answer of a man of the Mazdean Church to the solutions proposed within *The Letter of Tansar* concerning the most dramatic political problems of the last period of the Sasanian kingdom. Grignaschi, in particular, assumed that these two works contained remnants

6 Carra de Vaux 1896: 140.

7 Grignaschi 1966; 1969; 1973a; 1973b.

8 Cf. Hoyland 2008: 94-95. See also Boyce 1968: 66-58, and in particular n. 1 at p. 68. Cf. Herzfeld 1947, I: 114; Gagé 1964: 266-278.

9 Grignaschi 1966: 9.

of remarkable polemics about the ways to properly restore the power of the Sasanian monarchy in the framework of the first years of Yazdgerd’s III reign, just before the eruption of the Islamic invasion.¹⁰ Of course, this political material was not only translated into Arabic, but also refashioned according to Islamic categories and embedded into a kind of literature,¹¹ which partly belongs to the genre of the *Specula principis*. Practically, in these sources we can still see reflections of a harsh debate between the Royal Palace and the Mazdean Church, but the theology presented there cannot be uncritically discussed as a genuine witness to the Mazdean political ideology. What is most particularly relevant for the present discussion concerns the fact that a millennial fear is certainly present in *The Testament of Ardašir*,¹² when the king states that misfortune will come at the end of the millennium.¹³ The same idea is attested also in *The Letter of Tansar*, where it is declared that “after a thousand years [...] riot and disorder will come into the world [...]”.¹⁴ But this negative interpretation of the final period of a millennial cycle is neither Avestan, nor Mazdean *per se*. The appearance of Zoroaster marked the passage from the ninth to the tenth millennium of the Zoroastrian cosmic history, and that of his posthumous sons distinguish the passage of the three following (and final) millennia of the whole cycle until the final victo-

10 Grignaschi 1966: 9.

11 On the complexity of this material, and its intricate relations with the Sasanian background, see again Grignaschi (1973a: 142-147; 1973b: 99-100).

12 Grignaschi 1966: 83.

13 We must insist on the fact that king Ardašir was presented in late Sasanian literature and early Islamic sources as a sort of civilizing hero, and then most of the foundational institutions were attributed to him.

14 Boyce 1966: 67-68.

ry of Ohrmazd. Of course, the demonic enemy, Ahreman with his army, was (and is) active within the *gumēzišn* (i.e. the mixed reality of human history), but why should the Zoroastrians have taken into consideration *only* the inevitable negative events of this cosmic and historical fight? If we look carefully at the chronological account of the dramatic events marking the millennial history of the Iranian and Mazdean world as, for instance, presented in chapter XXXIII of the *Bundahišn*,¹⁵ we observe that some calamities occur in connection with the beginning (e.g., Ahreman’s invasion; Azdahāg’s takeover of power, but see also Zoroaster’s reception of the *dēn*) or the end of a millennium (the cutting of Jam into two pieces by the demons; Azdahāg’s defeat by Frēdon; but see also Wištāsp’s takeover of power), although there was no systemic and compelling rule connecting the change of millennium exclusively with a deadly demonic event.

What is striking is the reasonable emphasis on the fourth Zoroastrian millennium of the *gētīg* period (or the tenth millennium of the whole cycle of 12,000 years),¹⁶ in

15 See Pakzad 2005: 362-373; Agostini – Thrope 2020: 172-176.

16 See Panaino 2017b. The Mazdean millennialism should have exerted its own influence on the Manichaean tradition. Very fittingly, Taqizadeh (1956, and the revised edition of the year 1978; Italian version by Cristoforetti 2020: 107-108) noted what follows (the English translation from the Italian version is mine as well as the additions in square parenthesis): “Šahrastānī, in the *Kitāb al-mīlāl wa al-nihāl*, quotes one of the Manichaean leaders, whom he calls Abū Sa’īd. This wrote that the duration, or the cycle, of the mixture, i.e. the existence of the sensible world, is of 12,000 years, and that, until his epoch, i.e. in the year 271 of the hegira [= 884 CE), 11,700 years had already passed and that, thus, only 300 years remained till the final liberation. After this computation, the last millennium, the twelfth, should have begun in the year 183 C.E. I have not been able to understand which was the origin of such a statement. The Chinese document that places Mani’s birth in the year 527 of the cycle of the Fishes, which correspond to the twelfth



ABĒBĪM “Fearless”

which we find the diffusion of the religion of Zoroaster, the arrival of Alexander, the death of Dārāy ī Dārāyān, that of Yazdgerd (III), but also a sharp statement (XXXIII § 28) concerning the Arab usurpers.

It actually declares:

pad dēn gōwēd kū duš-padixšāyih ī awēšān sar kāmēd būdan.
It says in the *dēn*: «Their evil rule shall end»¹⁷

From this point of view, it is clear that the time span necessary to contain all these events compressed into the fourth millennium is insufficient, and it seems that at a certain moment the necessary period of time was reduced. But was this apparent compression really due to a millennial fear? And was it ancient or recent? And again: was the millennial fear due to an apocalyptic justification for a definitive reshaping of this chronology

zodiacal sign, presupposes the fact that the first year of the cycle of the Fishes (practically the twelfth millennium) corresponds to the first year of the Seleucid era, and that the first year of the Seleucid era and the date mentioned above run just 495 years.” The Chinese source (edited and studied by Haloun – Henning 1952: 196-197) is very important for us, because the synchronism between the cycle of the Fishes and the Seleucid era implies also the one with the era of Zoroaster, and this agreement is full of meaning in a cultural area strongly resonant of Zoroastrian traditions. We must recall that also al-Bīrūnī (*Chronology*, Sachau 1878: 129; Sachau 1879: 121) stated that according to the *Šābuhragān*, Mani was born in Babylonia in the year 527 of the era of the astronomers of Babylon, which al-Bīrūnī himself there considered as corresponding to the Seleucid era. With regard to Šahrastānī, we can now consult the French translation by Gimaret – Monnot (Shahrastani 1986: 662). The Arabic text also states that at the moment in which Šahrastānī was writing, there were left only 50 years before the end of the world, a piece of information very useful also for the date of redaction of the *Kitāb al-milal wa al-niḥal*.

17 See Pakzad 2005: 369; Agostini – Thrope 2020: 174.



post eventum? Grignaschi¹⁸ remarked that even Ferdowsi attributed Ardašir I with the prophecy of the end of his dynasty after five centuries, while the pseudo-Ašma'ī referred to six centuries for this event, so that it is obvious that concurrent figures circulated¹⁹ (and we will take into consideration other varieties below), all of them most presumably *post eventum*, and based on different chronological calculations. For example, Nyberg²⁰ interestingly observed that al-Bīrūnī (*Chronology*, 213)²¹ knew a tradition according to which, in the year 319 of the Hegira, i.e. the year 931 CE (= 1242 SE), exactly 1500 years²² had passed from Zoroaster's time, and

18 Grignaschi 1966: 90.

19 As Agostini kindly observes (personal communication), this prophecy occurs in the framework of a dialogue between Husraw II and Bahrām Čōbīn, in which the latter declares that the fall of the Sasanian dynasty must be expected because of its illegitimate ascent to power against the Parthians, whose rights Čōbīn vindicates (see Mohl 1878, vol. 7: 24).

20 Nyberg 1938: 35-36.

21 See Sachau 1878: 213; Sachau 1879: 196. Cf. also Jackson 1899: 161.

22 As very kindly Terribili remarks (private communication), the *Chronology* assumes the "Parthian" one in its extended version. The passage of al-Bīrūnī is very important also from the point of view of historical astrology. According to the prophecy, 1500 years would correspond to the end of the Arabic domination, as a Messianic advent. In the perspective of the authority promoting this model, both events were positive. Furthermore, these changes were not only linked to the shift of the millennium, but also to the other temporal phenomena, such as in particular the continuous modification of the astral configurations. Thus, al-Bīrūnī's description of Zoroaster's Anniversary and the Ismaili group that, after the conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn of the year 928 CE were waiting for the manifestation of the Mahdi in 930 CE, corresponding to the year 1500 since Zoroaster's death, and 1242 since the Seleucid Era, is remarkably important. In this case, the reference to the SE is correct, but apparently there is no clear way to infer the figure of 258 years before Alexander. One possibility, sug-

noted that by following this chronology, Zoroaster's millennium would end around the year 431 CE with its beginning in the year 569 BCE (from 569 BCE to 431 CE we have just 1000 years, while 931 – 431 makes straight 500 years). Despite the peculiarity of this sequence, I must observe that it finds a direct support in a strange tradition preserved in a Mazdean source, namely the *Pahlavi Rewāyat to the Dādestān ī Dēnīg* XLVIII,1,²³ where, 1500 years after Zoroaster, Ošēdar comes into consultation with Ohrmazd, while the *Zand ī Wahman Yasn* IX, 1,²⁴ gives the figure 1,600 years after the beginning of Zoroaster's millennium.²⁵ If we exclude the presence of bold mistakes, clearly there were alternative solutions and chronologies, as we will see again in this study.

Although Nyberg's²⁶ thesis stating that Wahrām Gōr (420-438) would have been associated with the first post-humous son of Zoroaster, i.e. Ošēdar, remains doubtful and in any case we do not possess evident sources claiming this legacy, we cannot deny that a range of solutions

gested by Terribili himself, is that the 258 years can be deduced if we suppose that these people were expecting (in connection with the year 1242 SE) the year 1500 from Zoroaster; $1242+258 = 1500$. On this matter, see in particular Stoyanov (2000: 155-158). Actually al-Bīrūnī stated that these people made a correct chronological computation, but they would have made a mistake in the interpretation of the astral omen. Actually, they would have assumed the restoration of the Magian kingdom, an event considered positive from their perspective. In the same framework, al-Bīrūnī attributed a certain 'Abū-'Abdallāh Al'ādī with a book on the astrological cycles and the planetary conjunctions, in which the 18th conjunction from the birth of the prophet Muḥammad would correspond to the 10th millennium under the lordship of Saturn and the Sagittarius; this statement was also based on Mazdean patterns; see Panaino 1996.

23 See Williams 1990, I: 172-173; II: 79, 228.

24 See Cereti 1995: 126, 145, 166.

25 See again the discussion by Williams 1990, II: 228.

26 Nyberg 1938: 35-37; cf. Grignaschi 1966: 89-90.



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was at his disposal,²⁷ and that the determination of the end of the millennium was open to different results.²⁸

This conclusion is supported by a striking fact given by Mas'ūdī himself, who in another famous work, the *Golden Meadows*,²⁹ did not mention at all this secret, but affirmed what follows:

the Mazdeans calculate between their prophet, son of Isbitaman, and Alexander, a period of 258³⁰ years; between Alexander, which they make to reign for 6 years, and the arrival of Ardašīr, 517 years. Finally, between Ardašīr and the hegira, 564 years.

For us it is interesting that in the framework of a patent Mazdean chronology, we find no reference to a shortened version of the Seleucid and Parthian periods, whose whole length seems to be of 511 years (i.e. 517 –

27 Wiesehöfer (2021: 179) underlines the fact that the direct contrast opposing Husraw II to Wahrām Čōbīn, a brilliant usurper who strongly emphasized his Parthian origin, later favored a strong censorship of Parthian memories and heritage. A certain emphasis on Wahrām is attested also in a particular passage of the *Bundahišn* XXXIII,32 (Agostini – Thrope 2020: 174), which fittingly Shapira (2020: 161, n. 138) considers strongly reminiscent of the aspiration to an Arsacid restoration. See below the note 43, 44, 54.

28 For instance, Herzfeld (1947, I: 7-8, 21) observed that according to the Pahlavi text *Māh ī Frawardīn rōz ī Hordād*, chap. 27 (Grenet 2009: 164), in which it is stated the within the first 18 years of the kingdom of Husraw (II), eighteen good things happened, and this evidence would point to the year 607/608 CE, corresponding to 904 of the era of Zoroaster. This text shows that no expectation of disasters was presumed, and that the contents were still full of optimism.

29 See Mas'ūdī (in the translation by de Meynard, de Curteille, revised by Pellat) 1965: 551, § 1434. Cf. Humbach 1998, I: 27, and n. 36. Jackson 1899: 162.

30 Humbach (1991, I: 28) mentions also al-Bīrūnī's reference (*Chronology* 14; Sachau 1878: 14; Sachau 1879: 17) to the figure 258, and his corrections later reported in his *Qanūn al-Mas'ūdī*.



6), certainly not of about two centuries and half.³¹ For instance, Mas'ūdī³² knew a number of sources that fixed the duration of the Parthian kings (referred to under the denomination of "Chiefs of the Satrapies") in 517 years, but he knew other traditions in which the figure was surely shorter.³³

In any case, the whole true period between Alexander's death (323 BCE) and the fall of the Sasanians (651 CE) covered slightly less than a millennium, while the one from the accession of Ardašīr (226 CE) made about 669 years, not the standard periods usually attributed within the Mazdean chronology. The tradition preserved by Mas'ūdī seems to depend upon another system, in which Alexander lived around the end of the 4th century BCE (as it was) and not in the 1st one, as it occurs if we follow the (evident, but strange) synchronism between the beginning of the era of Zoroaster and the Seleucid one. What is strange concerns the distance between the coronation of Ardašīr (226 CE) and the Hegira (622 CE), which is given in 564 years,³⁴ while they were only 396. The difference of 168 years is very peculiar. However, we must observe that previously Mas'ūdī had given³⁵ a more fitting figure in another place, where he wrote that

31 Yet, different chronologies were current. For instance, in the later history of Qāḍi Sā'id al-Andalusī (1070 CE), the dynasty of the so-called "Petty Kings", corresponding to the Arsacids, reigns for 537 years. See Khan 1994: 45-46.

32 See Mas'ūdī 1962, I: 208, § 559.

33 See Mas'ūdī 1962, I: 209, § 562. In the note 1, Pellat writes: "Pour Ṭabarī la durée totale des Arsacides est de 266 ans : Mas'ūdī, après avoir donné la chiffre de 517 ans, s'aperçoit qu'il n'arrive, dans son énumération, qu'à 288 ans, et cherche à se disculper. La durée des Arsacides est en réalité de 408 ans, et la nomenclature qui précède est largement incomplète".

34 See Mas'ūdī 1965, II: 651, § 1434.

35 See Mas'ūdī 1962, I: 245, § 657.

between Ardašīr and the Hegira the distance was of 404 years (i.e. the enthronement of the first Sasanian king would be put at around the year 318 CE). This means that, apart the inevitable occurrence of mistakes in the manuscript transmission of the figures contained in the texts, different chronologies circulated.³⁶

4. The Witness of Agathias II,26,1 and the Reduction of the Parthian Era

Our approach to this matter requires that we preliminarily clarify a series of essential questions. Was the reduction of the Parthian period a historical reality or not? Second, if it was so, as it seems (and we will discuss this subject soon), when and why was it decided? Third, was it due to such a millennial fear, as suggested by Mas'ūdī? This study will show that the answer to the third question is beyond any doubt negative. There was no fear in Sasanian times, and the "invention of this tradition"³⁷ was simply the fruit of a later explanation emerging in a completely new and dramatic context. But the rest of the catalogue presents us with more difficulties, which ask for more nuanced treatments.

The hypothesis that this reduction was done only after the fall of the Sasanian kingdom, originally suggested by Spiegel,³⁸ although apparently intriguing, is sharply countered by the fact that Agathias II,26,1 attributed

36 It would be useful to mention the fact that, according to al-Ṭabarī (in the translation of Rosenthal 1989: 195), the Magians would have assumed a duration of time from King Jayūmart to the hijrah of the prophet of 3,139 years, which is in contrast with the Mazdean millennialism.

37 Using this expression, I openly make reference to the interpretative model proposed by Hobsbawm – Ranger in 1983.

38 Spiegel 1878: 192.

the Parthian kingdom with a length of 270 years, a figure closer to that of 266 years which we can easily deduce from the Mazdean chronology (see below more in detail), to the 284 years (*dō sad ud haštād čahār*) attested in the chapter XXXVI,9 of the (Indian line of the) *Bundahišn*, or “200 and some more” (*dō sad ud and*; cf. also Ferdowsi in the *Šāhnāme: sāli devist* [“some two hundred years”])³⁹ in the Iranian mss tradition of this Pahlavi work.⁴⁰

At this point of the discussion, it will be useful to reflect on a simple list resuming the royal sequence, according to chapter XXXVI,8-10 of the *Bundahišn*. This series (until the Arsacids) starts with Wištāsp and ends with Alexander the Great, with four persons in between, one of whom was a princess, Humāy.⁴¹ Furthermore, we must observe that according to a plausible suggestion already offered by Christensen,⁴² the insertion in the Kayāniān list of Humāy and the two following kings named Darius belong to the Sasanian period, and partly reflects a re-elaboration of Jewish sources, which the Persian scribes should have known directly.

39 Cf. Gnoli 2000: 146-147; 2006b: 103-104.

40 See Pakzad 2005: 414, and n. 106; Agostini – Thrope 2020: 193; Klíma 1959: 558. Cf. also Shahbazi 2002: 25. A detailed discussion with a large bibliographical conspectus has been offered by Gnoli 2000: 146-157. We must recall that Ferdowsi knew only nine royal names of Parthian kings: Ašk, Šāpūr, Gōdarz, Bēzan, Nārsī, Ōrmuzd, Ārāš, Ardavān, and Bahrām; see for more details, Schoeler 2020: 510, and the footnotes 49 and 54.

41 West (1880: 150-151, n. 10) suggested an association with the Achaemenian queen Parysatis; cf. Jackson 1899: 160. One Parysatis (440-385 BCE ca) was the daughter of Artaxerxes I, and married Darius II Ochus. Another Parysatis (350-323 BCE ca) was one of the wives of Alexander the Great. Schoeler (2020: 504) recalls (with earlier bibliography) the identification of some Parthian kings of the 1st century CE in the *Šāhnāma*, but in the framework of the Kayāniān cycle.

42 Christensen 1936: 39; Grignaschi 1973b: 154.

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Wištāsp	120 years (= 30 before the end of the millennium plus 90)
Wahman ⁴³	112 years = 202
Humāy ⁴⁴	30 years = 232
Dārāy ī Čīhr-āzad	12 years = 244
Dārāy ī Dārāyān ⁴⁵	14 years = 258
Aleksandar	14 years = 272

Then, we have for the Aškānān 284 years⁴⁶ (or alternatively 200 and some more), and finally Ardašīr Pābagān; he ruled with the rest of the Sasanians the other 460 years (i.e. reasonably until the year 652 CE).

Aškānān	284 years or 200 and something; = 556 or about 484 plus x
Ardašīr + Sasanians	460 years: = 1020 or 931 (plus some more).

Then, the text deals with the year 447 of the Pārsīg era.⁴⁷ This chronological system probably refers to the year of the death of Yazdgerd III (651), and not to the beginning of his kingdom (632 CE).⁴⁸ At this point, the last

43 The same figure is given in the *Ayādgār ī Jāmāspīg* XV,3 (Agostini 2013: 71, 108).

44 The same figure is given in the *Ayādgār ī Jāmāspīg* XV,3 (Agostini 2013: 71-72, 108). Humāy is here presented as the daughter of Čīhr-āzad, so that the reference to the first Dārāy is missing.

45 In the *Ayādgār ī Jāmāspīg* XV,3 (Agostini 2013: 72, 108) the figure is 13 as in the case of Alexander.

46 But according to the tradition of the *Ayādgār ī Jāmāspīg* XV,6 the line of Ašk will reign for 282 years (Agostini 2013: 108). Agostini discusses these problems in his chapter. See again the discussion in Agostini 2013: 149-151.

47 See the detailed discussion in Panaino 2012b.

48 For the era of Yazdgerd and the Pārsīg era, and their difference, see Ginzel 1906, I: 298-300. Cf. also the discussion in Panaino 2012b.

redactor remarked that “now it is the year 527 of the Pārsīg era,” (*nūn pañ sad ud wīst ud haft sāl ī pārsīg*), i.e. we are around the year 1078 CE.⁴⁹ In this way, the later Zoroastrian scribe switches to another chronological system following the era of Yazdgerd.

As Klíma⁵⁰ demonstrated in a very convincing way, the witness of Agathias testifies that, at least around the age of Justinian, one Persian tradition already knew this chronological reduction.⁵¹ This evidence, of course, does not strikingly demonstrate that this calculation was introduced already under the kingdom of Ardašīr⁵² or later, but its attestation excludes the possibility of ascribing such a reduction to a post-Sasanian period. To this proposal we can recall that Shahbazi⁵³ explicitly tried to attribute the reduced chronology to an action promoted by Husraw I, in coincidence with the famous conference of the astronomers, which was summoned in the 25th year of his reign,⁵⁴ while, as we will see, Taqizadeh⁵⁵ preferred to bring forward, but every solution presents some problems.⁵⁶ For instance, if such a radical change would

49 Pakzad 2005: 414; Agostini – Thrope 2020: 193.

50 Klíma 1959: 563.

51 The rationale of the catalogue of the Parthian kings as preserved in the surviving Arabic lists, such as the ones of Mas‘ūdī and Tabarī, needs a special study. Actually, the memory of some kings was much better preserved, and the transmission of this historical knowledge should be better analyzed. See also the considerations by Schoeler 2020: 503, and *passim*.

52 Gershevitch (1995: 12-13) considered “irrational” the later explanation attested in Mas‘ūdī.

53 Shahbazi 2002: 27-29.

54 See Panaino 2020.

55 Taqizadeh 1937b: 134-139; 1947: 35-36.

56 Wiesehöfer kindly reminded me to impute the shortening of the Parthian period to the Sasanians after the revolt of Wahrām Čōbīn, which was passed off as Arsacid. We must consider that, in the framework of the *šāhnāma*, in his attack against the Sasanians,

have been decided only after the 25th year of Husraw I, in connection with an astronomical conference summoned by the king, it is probable that Agathias and others might have noticed something. Although this is not a definitive argument, certainly Agathias does not seem to mention such a recent change, but a long-aged tradition. Certainly, the existence of two chronological traditions in the *Bundahišn*, one pointing to a sequence of 258 + 14 + 284, and another showing 258 + 14 + 200 and some more (Shahbazi⁵⁷ suggested “203”), could be explained after the postulate that one followed the Seleucid era, the latter the Arsacid era, whose beginning took place 65 years later.⁵⁸ So if we suppose that 266 is the figure corresponding to the years usually (and wrongly) attributed to the Arsacid domination in the sources of Persian derivation, we have $266 - 65 = 201$.⁵⁹ Certainly, these evidences eventually show that two different Iranian traditions were at

Wahrām as a prestigious member of the Mehrān family seems to clearly abuse chronological and millennial speculations, presenting himself as the expected restorer of the Arsacid House 500 years after the usurpation by Ardašīr. The Parthian rebel actually seems to have claimed the foundation of a new dynasty. See Czeglédy 1958; Shahbazi 2000 and Daryae 2015.

57 Shahbazi 1986: 542-543.

58 We must recall that Nyberg (1929: 29) tried to reconnect the reference to the “year 700”, which he read into the Middle Persian inscription n° 3 of Derbend, to the Arsacid era, thus establishing a date fitting for the 6th century (= 553 CE), during the kingdom of Husraw I. Gropp (1970: 317, n. 4; 175: 316) accepted the reading 700, but, taking as a starting point the Seleucid era (311/12 BCE), suggested the year 389 CE. Gadjiev (2016) has offered a very clear summary of the debate recalling that Pachomov (1930: 14-15) criticized Nyberg’s interpretation and simply proposed “year 37”, a solution slightly modified by Henning (1958: 48) to “year 27”. It is clear that in these conditions, any speculation about the endurance of a secular era of the Persians, in one way or another, is too uncertain and risky.

59 Cf. Gnoli 2000: 148-149.

least well known,⁶⁰ and confirms that the Persians had

60 A similar problem has been identified in a peculiar passage attested in chapter A-XXXVIII,6-12, of the *Mādayān ī Hazār ī Dādestān*, where Farroxmard wondered if the date of Yazdgerd must be put in the first or the second half of the tenth century (Macuch 1981: 64-65, 221-222, 232-233; Perikianian 1997: 316-317). While the terminology of the passage is clear: *satō.zim-*, an Avestan term, means “century” (lit. “hundred winters”); “half century” is *panjāhag*, (lit. “block of fifty”), the historical sense of the text in its wholeness is complex and debated. The source doubtlessly refers to a Mazdean tenth century, i.e. to the end of a millennium, which took place apparently before the kingdom of Husraw Anōšāg-ruwān, who is expressly referred to. The swing between the first and the second half of this very last century, referred to in the source, has been connected with a possible alternative computation between a proper Sasanian or Parthian chronology (as in the *Bundahišn*) with a difference of about 50 years, i.e. something around half a century (see the discussions by Grignaschi 1971: 143-147; Shahbazi 1987; 542; Gnoli 2000: 151-152). I sincerely doubt that this one could be a reasonable solution, or that we should admit that the Sasanians had decided to cut the time in front of the end of the millennium. The proof against this conclusion is in this very passage, where there is no fear for the end of the millennium, which is quoted without problems. Bulsara (1937, II: 543-546), the first scholar to comment on this chapter, assumed that the contents should be framed within the kingdom of Husraw II, although he did not exclude that of Husraw I as well. Furthermore, he stated that the direct reference to the ancestors of Husraw Anōšāg-ruwān should compellingly support the identification of the firstly mentioned Yazdgerd with the second Sasanian king having this very name (i.e. Yazdgerd II, 439-457). But this interpretation seems to be countered, as noted by Macuch (1981: 232), by the fact that some historical priests, such as Ādurbōzēd, and Ādurpād ī Zardūštān, there explicitly mentioned, can be reasonably identified as persons living during the kingdom of Yazdgerd I (399-421), the first one as the Grand *mōbed* and the latter as his *rad*. This evidence is impressive and difficult to overcome. For her side, Perikianian (1997: 317) preferred to identify Yazdgerd II (439-457) in the king mentioned in the following part of this chapter. This king was presented as living in the second half of the last century of that millennium. We could probably combine the two hypotheses, if we

a better competence in these matters than is frequently supposed. Furthermore, this difference and the peculiar figure 284 attest that in the period of composition of the last chapter of the *Bundahišn*, chronological precision was no more current, and that some confusion and different opinions circulated around the length of the Parthian period. This conclusion is confirmed also from a well-known Mandaean source, namely the *Ginzā*, Right Side, XVIII Book, 382,21, which gives a confused and peculiar chronology, in which firstly the Parthian kings (Ašgan) were attributed with 470 years of kingdom,⁶¹ but again we find an Ašaq, son of Ašgan, who ruled for 465 years, followed by Alzur and Lištar Kosrou and Abaš (Wabaš?) Jasdis Țibian. The last king, usually named Ardban, would have ruled for 14 years (*Ginzā*, Right Side, XVIII Book, 382,25-27), then followed by the Sasanians, to whom a period of 382 years was attributed.⁶² The apocalyptic climax

admit the existence of a chronology in which the beginning of the tenth and last century started under the kingdom of Yazdgerd I, while its end (with the end of the millennium) took place around the last years of Yazdgerd II, as suggested by Grignaschi (1971: 146), but without assuming any desperate cut of time for the reasons explained in this study. Certainly, if we start with the synchronism based on the beginning of the Zoroaster era with the Seleucid one, i.e. 312/11 BCE, the end of the millennium would fall on 688/89 CE. These chronological distinctions clearly show that there were other kinds of chronological computations current in Sasanian Iran.

61 See Shapira 2000: 137 and n. 24; cf. already Lidzbarski 1925: 410-417. I must thank again Dr. Terribili who called my attention to these sources, and in particular to the fact that this figure is correct, if we consider its last year as corresponding to 224 CE. In Mas'ūdi (Carra de Vaux 1896: 137-138), we actually find the Ašgān, descendants of Ašgān, son of Aš, and again of Ašk son of Ašk. It is really interesting the comparison with the royal names and the lists of the Arsacid kings preserved by Țabarī. In particular, in one of these lists (Perlmann 1987 vol. 4: 101), they reign for 475 years. Cf. already von Gutschmid 1861.

62 Lidzbarski 1925: 411; Shapira 2020: 138.



of this chronology points in the direction of a composition belonging to the last part of the Sasanian kingdom, or better to the first years of the Arabic domination.⁶³

In any case, if we recall that the starting point of the era of Zoroaster was the year 1 SE, and that the accession of Ardašīr corresponded to the year 538 SE (= 226 CE), the end of the millennium would inevitably fall after 462 years, exactly in the year 1000 SE = 668 CE. Thus, the figure 284 for the years of the Aškānān is too long, even in this chronology, while that of 200 and something is a little bit too short with respect to the expected figure of 266 years.

Let us start reading Agathias’s remarks in II,26,1.⁶⁴

Ἐβδομέκοντα δὲ ἐτῶν ἤδη ἐπὶ διακοσίοις παρῳηκόντων ἀπὸ Ἀρσάκου τοῦ προτέρου ἐς Ἀρτάβανον τὸν ἔσχετον βασιλέα, ἠνίκα τὰ Ῥωμαίων πράγματα ὑπὸ Ἀλεξάνδρῳ τῷ Μαμαίας παιδὶ ἐτετάχατο, κατ’ ἐκεῖνο δὴ τοῦ καιροῦ τὸ Χοσρόου τοῦ καθ’ ἡμᾶς βασιλεύειν ἤρξατο γένος ἢ τε μέχρι καὶ νῦν παρὰ Πέρσαις κατέχουσα πολιτεία ἐν τῷ τότε ἀρχὴν εἴληφε καὶ οἶον κατάστασιν πρώτην.

The passage of two hundred and seventy years from Arsaces the first king to Artabanus the last one marks the inception, during the reign of the Roman Emperor Alexander the son of Mamaea, of the dynasty to which the contemporary Chosroes belongs. It was at this time also that the present-day Persian state took shape.⁶⁵

If Agathias’ reference confirms the existence of an Iranian chronology in which the Parthian era was

63 See again the discussion by Shapira 2020.

64 See the critical text, edited by Keydell in Agathias 1967: 75. Cf. Gnoli 2000: 147; 2004; 2006a; 2006b.

65 See Frendo’s translation of Agathias (1975: 60); cf. Maraval 2007: 113-114.





shortened (a date obtained probably by following inner Middle Persian sources via the famous interpreter named Sergios),⁶⁶ he also (IV,24,1) shows knowledge of a period of 538 years for the time span between Alexander and the beginning of the Sasanian dynasty, whose origin has been at least in part explained.

Agathias IV,24,1:⁶⁷

[...] ἐκεῖνο δὲ μόνον προσθεῖην ἂν ἐπ' αὐτῷ, ὡς ἔτεσιν ὕστερον ὀκτώ τε καὶ τριάκορτα καὶ πεντακοίοις Ἀλεξάνδρου τοῦ πάνυ τοῦ Μακεδόνοσ, τετάρτῳ δὲ ἔτει τῆσ θατέρου Ἀλεξάνδρου τοῦ Μαμαΐασ ἀρχῆσ, τῆσ τῶν Πηρωῶν βασιλείασ ἐπιλαβομένῳ τῷ Ἀρταξάρη, καθ' ὃν πρότερον ἀπὴνγγελται τρόπον, διήνυσται χρόνοσ ἐν αὐτῇ ἐνιαυτῶν πεντεκαίδεκα, δυοῖν μηνοῖν ἐνδεόντοῖν.

[...] I have nothing more to add with regard to him (i.e. Ardašīr) except that he seized the throne of Persia in the manner I described earlier, in the fourth year of the reign of the other Alexander (i.e. of Severus Alexander), the son of Mamaea, five hundred and thirty-eight years after Alexander the Great; and that he reigned for fourteen years and ten months.⁶⁸

66 See the discussion by Cameron 1969-70: 100-101, 105-106. Cf. also Schoeler 2020: 513.

67 See the critical text, edited by Keydell in Agathias 1967: 153. Cf. Gnoli 2000: 147; 2004; 2006a; 2006b.

68 See Frendo's translation of Agathias (1975: 126), which I follow with some integrations. Cf. also Maraval 2007: 210. As Frendo remarks (n. 11), Agathias loosely refers to the Seleucid era under a generic reference to Alexander. On this subject, see the different opinions of the scholars who mostly have studied this subject, in particular Gnoli 2000: 135; 2004; 2006a; 2006b: 106-108; and Shabbazi (1977: 27-30; 1990: 218-219; 2002. See also Sunderman 1991: 433 (= 2002: 444). Cf. already Herzfeld 1947, I: 10; Nyberg 1938: 33-34; 1966: XII; 1968: 46; Altheim 1947: 107.



The same synchronism can be deduced after Elias of Nisibis, who agreed with Agathias on the year 538 as the beginning of the Sasanian rule (= 26th September 226 CE).⁶⁹

Some years ago, Shahbazi resumed the debate remarking that Lewy,⁷⁰ Taqizadeh,⁷¹ Henning,⁷² and he⁷³ himself had explained this “secret” in a very convincing way:

Under the Sasanians the Seleucid era had come to be identified as the era of Zoroaster, and Alexander had been placed 258 years after Zoroaster; the appearance of Ardašīr in the 538th year of the Seleucid era was then re-interpreted as his rise in the 538th year of the millennium of Zoroaster; of these 538 years, 258 separated Zoroaster from Alexander and 14 belonged to the latter; so (538 – 258 + 14 =) 266 years were left for the Parthian period. The Sasanian measure was taken, then, not because the Parthian period was to be reduced, but because the widely used Seleucid era had to be Zoroastrianized.

More or less this is the pattern, which has been followed, and that seems plausible, because it is the only one that in one way or another explains and harmonizes the chronological and numerical data.

Given these facts, we can follow different options, and place the cutting under Ardašīr or Šābuhr I, as suggested by Taqizadeh,⁷⁴ or again during the kingdom of

69 Ginzler 1906, I: 305.

70 Lewy 1940: 1944.

71 Taqizadeh 1947: 33-35.

72 Henning 1951: 37-38; cf. Shahbazi 2002: 18-19. I believe that Henning’s hypothesis, according to which the Seleucid era “only gradually came to be used in Persian, where its introduction passed unnoticed,” is unbelievable. If it was unnoticed, why would the Persians have fixed the starting point of their religious chronology, the beginning of the 10th (= fourth) millennium, from year 1 of the SE?

73 Shahbazi 1986.

74 Taqizadeh 1937b: 137-138.

Husraw I, as suggested by Shahbazi.⁷⁵ Most of the scholars who have dealt with this subject, admit that the Persians of the Sasanian period, and in an increasing way in the course of their kingdom, should have known the true historical chronology. This observation is a great obstacle to any simplistic solution, because if, as I too assume, the Persians had an intercultural knowledge of chronological and calendrical problems, there was no way to ignore the value and the figure belonging to the Seleucid era (starting in the year 312/11 BCE = SE 1) and to the Parthian era (starting in the year 247 BCE = PE 1 = SE 64).⁷⁶ Henning⁷⁷ in his presentation of the facts assumed that:

At the beginning of the Sassanian epoch there was current in Persia only one era by which events could be conveniently dated: the Seleucid era.

And this is perfectly sound. But Henning⁷⁸ also stated that:

The Persians did not know that it was a foreign era. Wrongly believing it to be an indigenous way of counting years, they combined it recklessly with their world-year of twelve thousand years, which had been devised many centuries earlier, perhaps in the fifth century B.C.

The same assumption is shared by some scholars, such as Gnoli himself,⁷⁹ who consider the absence of references to a Seleucid era in Middle Persian sources as evidence of this ignorance. But, this presentation of the facts, as certain arguments *ex silentio*, sound a little bit pe-

75 Shahbazi 2002: 27-29, *passim*.

76 Cf. Parker – Dubberstein 1956: 38-41; cf. Assar 2003.

77 See Henning 1951: 37.

78 See Henning 1951: 37-38.

79 Gnoli 2000: 144.

cular and in my opinion, they require some critical comments. If the conclusion about the combination of two traditions (the Seleucid computation and the Mazdean millennium), and the assumption that the origin of the millennial doctrine goes back to the Achaemenian period, are absolutely correct, then on the contrary, the following presumption that the cultural derivation of the Seleucid era was *completely ignored* seems to be highly improbable. Firstly, it was based on a different calendrical system, a lunar one with intercalations (originally based on the Metonic cycle, since 330 BCE improved with the more precise intercalation system known as the Callippic one),⁸⁰ and not purely solar, thus significantly different from the Zoroastrian one. Secondly, this system presented two practical varieties, one according to the Babylonian system, the latter according to the Macedonian one: they were different with regard to their respective beginnings. The Babylonian system started with the vernal equinox, while the Macedonian one with fall. This also justifies the differences of 6 months (or of 1 year) in the dates according to the two calendrical varieties and the fact that one officially begins in the year 312 and the latter in 311 BCE.⁸¹ Furthermore, the existence of a separate Parthian era, a fact obviously recognized by Henning,⁸² but nevertheless considered of very limited importance, shows that another Iranian dynasty, well known by the Sasanians, who were for some years its vassals, despite the fact that it had followed the new pattern introduced by the Seleucids, had the self-esteem to react with an independent chronology. In this international

80 Cf. Bickerman 1980: 24-26, 29, 70-71.

81 See Ginzler 1906, I, 136-138, who named the Babylonian version of the Seleucid era as *κατὰ Χαλδαίους*, following Ptolemy's *Almagest* (IX,8-10 and XI,7; cf. Toomer 1984: 452, 541).

82 See Henning 1951: 37, n. 4.

framework, in which the Persian element was trying to reemerge with pride, it is improbable that the Persian bureaucracy and the Sasanian elites did not know some simple facts about dates, calendars and synchronisms. In particular, we know that the Parthians⁸³ with whom the new Persian dynasty had inevitably a number of close contacts (and with which, or at least with part of it, the Sasanian family established a prudent alliance after its victory) used both varieties of the Seleucid era, and dated their documents and official coins according to both systems, the Babylonian or the Macedonian. This patent difference was due to the place of issue of their coins, whether it be Babylon or Seleucia, although in any case the astronomical rules basically following the Metonic/Callippic cycles were respected and even improved.⁸⁴ It is more reasonable to imagine that the Persian of the early Sasanian period (and even their ancestors) did not mention it, probably because it was well known that the system was introduced by the Greek enemies, but also because this problem was of minor relevance thanks to the Babylonian adaptation of that era, which allowed a neutralization of its ethnic and foreign origin. In any case, the presence of Parthian coins with the abbreviations of the month names according to the Macedonian system, shows that the Hellenistic derivation was certainly known.⁸⁵ Thus, the excess of ignorance attributed by Henning to the Persians in their process of acquisition (and neutralization) of the Seleucid era in Persia seems to me too simplistic, and we will discuss it better below. More prudently, I would say that normal people certainly

83 An earlier discussion of this problem was already developed by Herzfeld 1947, I: 11.

84 See again Assar 2003, *passim*.

85 See Assar 2003: 176-184. Cf. also Ellerbrock in Ellerbrock - Winkelmann 2012: 164-166.

did not know the true origin of that era (and probably they were not interested at all in such knowledge), but that some circles of Sasanian society were well acquainted with the true facts.

In the framework of a critical evaluation of the theory supposing the complete ignorance of the Seleucid era among the Sasanians, we must consider also the Christian Syriac tradition.⁸⁶ This continuously referred to the Seleucid era, and in earlier sources, as in Dura Europos, a double dating was even offered (e.g., 368 AE = 432 SE), and this happened on Parthian inscriptions in Greek or on parchments.⁸⁷ As a direct witness of this chronological use, we can mention the trilingual inscription of Zebed (Greek, Syriac and early Pre-Islamic Arabic),⁸⁸ dated 24th of the month Gorpaios in the year 823 SE (= September 24th of the year 512 CE), found by Sachau in Syria.⁸⁹ This text concerns the foundation of the church dedicated to the martyrdom of Saint Sergios,⁹⁰ a well-known Christian authority in Persia. For instance, John of Ephesus (6th century CE) usually referred to the Seleucid era, and, last but not least, even Christian communities in Central Asia adopted it. In this case, the Seleucid era was frequently referred to in the inscriptions engraved on tombstones, sometimes together in synchronism with the Central Asiatic Uighur animal cycle.⁹¹ We can also find the Seleucid era explicitly mentioned in the *Synodicon Orientale*, for instance, in the case of the *Synodos* of Joseph (554 CE): “in the year 863 of the computation of the

86 I must thank Jeffrey Kotyk and Vittorio Berti for the kind discussions about this problem.

87 See Assar 2003: 177-178; Ellerbrock in Ellerbrock – Winkelmann 2012: 165.

88 See Kugener 1907: 515, 518; 1908: 581.

89 Sachau 1881.

90 See Fowden 1999.

91 See the discussion offered by Dickens 2009.

Greeks, according to the era of Alexander, son of Philip, [...], etc.”,⁹² but another fitting example comes from the *Martyrdom of Saint Grigor*.⁹³ Another very striking example comes from the Chinese-Syriac bilingual inscription of Xi'an, where the Syriac version of the “Nestorian Stele” erected by the Christian clergyman Adam to celebrate the arrival of Christianity in China, refers to the year 1092 of the Greeks [781 CE].⁹⁴ Thus, we know for certain that the Christians in China knew and adopted the Seleucid era, and if we consider that some of them had a clear Persian or Sogdian background, we can infer that the Seleucid computation was current also among them. The significant role played in this area by authorities of Persian aristocratic origin was impressive, in particular those belonging to the Sasanian royal family.⁹⁵ Among these persons, I can mention, for instance, Alouhan, who seems to have had prestigious roots in the highest levels of the Sasanian nobility.⁹⁶ All these facts show that it would be implausible to presume that the Seleucid era represented a special mystery to Iranian society, at home or abroad. It would be very difficult to maintain that all the references we have collected might escape the eyes and the minds of earlier and contemporary Persians, Christian⁹⁷ or not.

92 See Chabot 1902: 354.

93 See Jullien 2015, I: 46; II: 45.

94 See Saeki 1908: 35-38; Pelliot 1996.

95 Panaino 2017c with additional bibliography.

96 Antonino Forte (apud Pelliot 1996: 375-428) suggested, although with prudence, that Alouhan, whose Chinese spelling should correspond to Warahrām or Wahrām, was perhaps a member of the Sasanian royal family, and does not exclude that he could be a son of Husraw II and thus a brother of Yazdgerd III. Despite the fact that we have no definitive evidence underpinning this suggestive solution, it is certain that Alouhan was a highly prestigious personage belonging to the highest stratum of the Persian aristocracy.

97 For the dating systems current within the Christian Syriac

An additional remark concerns the Armenian data. As Giusto Traina kindly notes to me,⁹⁸ some Medieval Armenian chroniclers still endured in using the “era of the Syrians”, i.e. the Seleucid one,⁹⁹ but direct knowledge of the Macedonian calendar with its months is explicitly attested already in the Hellenistic inscription of Armawir.¹⁰⁰ Thus, it is highly improbable that the Armenians, since the earliest times, did not know the Seleucid computation of the years and ignored the necessary synchronism with it.

We have observed that, within some chronologies of Iranian derivation, the whole period of the Parthian dynasty was at a certain point shortened and fixed to only 266 years (or in closer figures), in any case ending in the year 226 CE (= 538 of the Seleucid era = 474 of the Parthian era), when Ardašīr I ascended to the throne of the *šāhān šāh* and the new dynasty began. According to Mas‘ūdī’s presentation of the facts, this accession corresponds to the year 260 from Alexander. It is also interesting to recall that the true Parthian chronological era had started some years after the death of Alexander (that happened in 323

framework, see Kaufhold 2008. Despite the fact that this article mainly concerns the use of Christian dating, it not only shows that Syriac Christianity in all its confessional varieties knew the Seleucid Calendar, but also the flexibility in the parallel use of some other chronological systems, such as the Muslim one, that of Yazdgerd, the Jewish, the Uighur, etc. This complexity reveals also that the multicultural, multi-religious and multilingual framework typical of Syria, Iran, Central Asia and India, favored the circulation of different contemporary systems, and that the Greek origin of the Seleucid era, as its direct link with the historical figure of Alexander was known everywhere.

98 Personal communication (April 11 2021).

99 See Delaurier 1859: 230, *passim*.

100 See Traina 2018: 297. N.B. a similar inscription has been found in Ninive.

BCE),¹⁰¹ and precisely in the year 247 BCE (Parthian era 1 = 64 Seleucid era). It is very important to note that the line of the Arsacid dynasty began a few years (ca. 76) after the end of the (personal) kingdom of Alexander the Great (if calculated in 14 years as in the Persian tradition).¹⁰² So $258 + 14 = 272$; while $272 + 266 = 538$. Later effects of this way of reconstructing the ancient history were quite widespread among some Islamic historians, as shown by Lewy,¹⁰³ although she assumed that these chronologists would have presumably followed a Sasanian practice. In this regard, we can be at the moment more prudent, because during the Sasanian period, there was no reason to change *ex abrupto* and in a deliberate way the duration of the Parthian era, and we cannot *a priori* accuse the Sasanian chronologists of having sloppily modified the duration of that era, or of having adopted and known *only one* system of time computation.

As well shown by al-Bīrūnī in his *Chronology* (129),¹⁰⁴ the Parthian (better Aškānān) chronology would have been greatly disturbed over the course of the time after the dissolution of this dynasty, so that much confusion

101 This date is confirmed also in an *Astronomical Diary*; Sachs – Hunger 1988: 2006–207 (No. -322B); cf. also Assar 2003: 174.

102 In any case, the strong polemics about the interpretation of the role of these 14 years with close regard to the true determination of the exact dating of Zoroaster are meaningless. As in the case of the astronomical calculations in antiquity concerning the determination of the minutes and seconds, or even of the decimals of a second, in which a given event should have taken place are of no use, because we should be sufficiently content to have established the right date and hour of a certain phenomenon, to fix the exact year of the birth or of the public manifestation of Zoroaster is an excess of optimism, justified only by the assumption *a priori* that the figures we utilize are absolutely precise.

103 Lewy 1944.

104 See again Sachau 1878: 129; 1879: 127.

would have affected the royal lists of the kings living in the period between Alexander (with his Greek followers) and the Sasanians, but this is a kind of phenomenon too generic, which needs to find an appropriate historical and cultural framework. So, as it has been proposed, it seems highly implausible. If it started during the beginning of the Sasanian period, how do we explain the silence of the Armenian royal family and nobility, which could have certainly kept a better memory of the Parthian era and of the kingdoms belonging to their Parthian royal relatives? The Sasanian bureaucracy and administration at least at certain – perhaps the highest ranks – , obviously knew and used Greek. The sources, although in an approximate way, suggest that the environment of Ardašīr’s court was not overly provincial, and that certain circles had access to a good level astrological literature, which they practiced with sufficient competence.¹⁰⁵ Other reflections of a Western cultural tradition seems to have been relevant in early Sasanian times, and it would be farfetched to assume *a priori* that this kind of transmission was absent during the Parthian epoch, when the “Hellenophilia” was much more *à la page*.¹⁰⁶ The evident impact of a chronological confusion certainly might emerge in a dramatic way after the Islamic invasion, considering the very vague interest of the Persians for the Parthian past, and a calendrical disentanglement with regard to remote historical facts could have been significantly increased. This framework is therefore plausible when we try to consider the status of the Sasanian Royal Archives after the Arab conquest of Ctesiphon. Nevertheless, an explanation only based on these arguments in my opinion is insufficient and simplistic. Why would the era of Alexander, better

105 See Panaino 2020d.

106 See the discussion in Panaino 2020d.

the Seleucid era, with its many different and alternative denominations, such as the “era of the Astrologers of Babylon”, etc., have been associated with the era of Zoroaster,¹⁰⁷ imposing not only a shortage of the Parthian period, but also the annihilation of any explicit reference to the Seleucid dynasty (and chronology), which was resurrected only in its numerical evidence?

5. The National Memory and the Iranian Amnesia

An important debate has been opened by Schoeler¹⁰⁸ in order to explain the reasons behind the very peculiar amnesia that affected the memory of the events, which occurred within the most ancient Iranian historical periods, in particular the ones concerning not only famous dynasties, such as those of the Medes and Achaemenians, but also those of the Seleucids and Parthians. The matter is dramatically complex, and I can only touch upon some aspects of it, also because a serious discussion involves not only historiographical matters, but also a number of epistemological¹⁰⁹ and anthropological problems.

107 As Terribili remarks (private communication), it would be very fitting to mention a particular passage belonging to *Dēnkard* VII,4,72 (Molé 1967: 56-57; Rashed-Mossael 2010: 68-69), which I have already studied some years ago (Panaino 2007). This text connected the transition of the millennium with Zoroaster in Babylonia and at the court of Wištāsp, and exalts the higher position of Zoroaster’s wisdom than the Babylonian. On the other hand, this text preserves a memory of a cultural knowledge of the importance played by the Babylonian tradition and its cultural heritage.

108 See Schoeler 1988a; 1988b; 2020.

109 See, for instance, the contributions by Brockmeier 2014 and 2015. In particular, I share Brockmeier’s personal suggestion (private communication) with regard to some limits present in the models adopted by Vansina (even in the new version advanced by Assmann

Schoeler summarizes some past debates, taking into consideration the most pertinent studies by Yarshater,¹¹⁰ Boyce,¹¹¹ and Daryaee¹¹² (among many others) with regard to the preservation and oblivion of the national history, with particular attention to the Achaemenian dynasty, rightly emphasizing the “hourglass effect”, discovered by Vansina¹¹³ with regard to the gaps that frequently hit the memory of some historical facts lying between the oldest events (generally considered foundational and full of meaning) and the most recent ones. In the framework of this discussion, I would like to emphasize that we must distinguish, as Schoeler suggests, oral traditions and written sources. But in this case, I would like to propose a further distinction within the area covered by the “oral dimension”. Firstly, we must register the patent fact that some Persian Zoroastrian priestly circles inevitably combined the (eastern and Sīstānic) Avestan heritage of the Pīšdādīān and Kayāniān rulers with that of the Achaemenians. These people were not only forging a mixture of different traditions, but their scope was also one of arranging a never-ending religious inner-histo-

2005; 2008). More precisely, according to these models, individual memory seems to come out only as an identical reproduction, or as a copy of social or cultural memory. The interaction and interference between cultural, social and individual “memories”, probably present a deeper complexity than is usually assumed by Vansina. It is actually very difficult to find good evidence with which it can be simply assumed that individual memories in pre-modern cultures (thus in a framework completely different in relation to our modern Western societies) are just a copy, or a “pendant”, of communicative and cultural memory.

110 Yarshater 1971; 1976; 1983a; 1983b; 2006.

111 Boyce 1954.

112 Daryaee 1995; 2006; 2018.

113 See Vansina 1985; we must also consider the later adaptation of this theory by Assmann 2008.

riography. Their effort was combined with a reorganization of the liturgy in harmony with the new solar calendar of Egyptian origin. Although the Avestan texts do not mention any historical ruler recognizable as Median or Achaemenian, it is reasonable to suppose that a process of *Annäherung* between the secular dynastic line of Persia and the ancestral company of the primordial Zoroastrian heroes should have been attempted in one way or another. Unfortunately, this process cannot be discerned in its details, but a few remnants of it should give an idea of a larger phenomenon, in which myth and history were mutually entangled, most probably with a prominent weight given to the mythical aspects.¹¹⁴ Something similar should have involved also the mythical background of the Arsacids, but in this case too we can observe only fragments of a more complex oral situation. Secondly, after the collapse of the Achaemenian Empire, local governors, even the most provincial ones, should have kept a sort of political-administrative elite constituting the kernel of their bureaucratic offices. The Iranian element was never destroyed; on the contrary, it was compelled to deal with other cultures. Thus, these groups were *volentes nolentes* breathing the Hellenist atmosphere, acquiring new competences despite the partial loss of their heritage and the decay of their memory, which was probably reshaped, but never totally erased. For instance, even minor kingdoms of the Iranian territories were able to mint coins with legends, sometimes in Greek, converting their dates to those of the Seleucids and then to the Parthians, and the diffusion of these competences suggest that the arrival of Alexander, despite its tremendous effects, did not

114 Of course, we must be careful in our evaluation of the ancient sensibility with regard to the subject of mythology, which for us is strictly separated from history, while this point of view cannot be considered normal and standard in the ancient world.

produce a desertification of the Iranian cultural world, but a contradictory, dialectical situation. The compelling “synecism” with the Hellenic (and Hellenistic) element certainly produced a gap (or even many gaps), and this void was probably expanded during the following Arsacid period, but we know that the Babylonian scribal element (with its literary, chronological and scientific competences) was not destroyed at all, and that some Iranians, in particular Parthians and Persians as well, remained in close contact with a number of attractive foreign elements. Furthermore, the main houses of the Parthian kingdoms were full of pride for their past, a past strictly linked to some religious cycles well preserved even in the Avestan heritage.¹¹⁵ The active and seminal contribution of the Parthian minstrels, the *gōsān*,¹¹⁶ promoted a kind of oral literature that was archaic, but full of modern “association”, and its oral contribution was widespread. This diffusion increased, when the northern linguistic elements were mixed with Middle Persian, and generated a widespread slang named Dari,¹¹⁷ which resurrected some materials belonging to the Parthian lore.

The least we can say is that the situation is too complex and that any excess of dogmatism would be unreasonable. For instance, the polemics about the presence of just one or two lines of transmission¹¹⁸ are sterile, because the lines were probably more numerous. Firstly, we must consider that any noble house protected their priests and their familiar fires with their traditional liturgies and ritual varieties. These shrines were probably a place where the processes of liturgical transmission were

115 For instance, about the cycle of Araš, see Panaino 2019b.

116 Boyce 1957.

117 See the discussion by Panaino 2021b.

118 See the critical discussion in Schoeler 2020: 505, n. 21, with a full conspectus of the bibliographical details.

preserved, and only with the definitive supremacy of the Sasanian normalization of the cults, as confirmed by the public statements made by Šābuhr I and Kerdīr about religious matters and temples, was a trend toward a standardization established (although we do not know if it was systematically attained and imposed with full success). The emphasis within Zoroastrian introspective history placed on Ardašīr I, to whom even guests belonging to the cycle of Cyrus were conveyed, as suggested by Gutschmidt,¹¹⁹ and remarked again by Schoeler,¹²⁰ is well explicable within a process of exaltation of the (new) origin of the Persian power, and reflects some patterns detected by Vansina in his studies. The new ruler as founder of the power embodies the qualities, which the common memory, the remainders of a transmitted oral heritage, attributed to a hero too far away to be particularly significant for the living audience. Thus, the past lived again; in few words it was resurrected, into the present. In my opinion, the elaboration of a new religious chronology was part of a process of redetermination of the memory, but from the unilateral point of view of the Persians of late antiquity, it was in the name of the pan-Iranian Mazdean heritage, but this pretention does not necessarily correspond to the objective historical truth. In this sense, this elaboration did not reflect a sort of historical recognition *in se et per se* of the data and facts, but it was a sort of process of self-representation of the leading Persian dynasty within the teleological progress of the *dēn* and the future course of the time. What I would like to distinguish in this case concerns the fact that a number of concurrent auto-bio-oral processes (to speak of bio-graphic processes would be in part an anachronism)

119 See von Gutschmidt 1880b: 586-587 (= 1889-1894, III: 133-134). Cf. again Schoeler 2020: 517, n. 93 with further bibliographical remarks.

120 Schoeler 2020: 517.

of self-representations within historical time were obviously current also among the other noble Iranian houses, and that these different narratives necessarily should have circulated, sometimes rooted in similar cycles belonging to the early Iranian heroic heritage, but probably with many local variations. The progressive prominence of the Persians exalted *one* point of view, where the past was reframed according to a dominant perspective, but this solution was not unique, neither without open or hidden alternatives. In addition, the memory on which self-consciousness was based, assumed many religious and teleological motivations and reflected a number of political dynastic targets. This process was not directed with historical care and academic precision, but was a political operation, strictly foundational for the same Sasanian identity. This evidence, of course, does not imply that the Sasanian elites did not know other varieties, antagonistic or simply alternative reconstructions, but that this different presentation of the facts was not essential for them or simply that these alternative “histories” did not correspond to their primary interests. It would be peculiar to presume that an international bureaucratic office of political affairs, such as that of the Sasanians, ignored the rules of the Seleucid and Egyptian calendars, their true chronologies, or other systems of temporal computations. But these were different competences, probably shared also by the same persons, who, despite the religious knowledge, mastered other abilities and played a role in which the scrutiny of the others was relevant. For these reasons, also the discussion about the memory of the Achaemenians in Sasanian times is also partly misleading. The Achaemenian heritage was modest within the common sensibility of the Sasanian period, and this is clearly visible in its scarce effects and objective remains, but the glories of such a prestigious past had been digested and embedded into a new religious

and ideological reconstruction with some variants of which we know only a few. This fact does not exclude that the Greek, Jewish and Syriac traditions were partly acquired in Iran, in particular when we well know that these sources exalted the power of the Persian world. If kings such as Husraw I were interested in Plato and Aristotle, although perhaps in superficial ways, can we assume for certain that the Western and Christian scholars (and priests),¹²¹ who had access to the same royal persons, did not profit to present them with pieces of historical literatures regarding the Persian past? Is it possible that the Christians did not inform contemporary Persians, for instance in the course of their evangelization processes, of the importance attributed to the Persian kings of the Past? When Mār Aba, during the synod of the year 540,¹²² honored Husraw I as “a new Cyrus”, with an implicit reference to the fact that the latter was the unique king to be presented in the *Bible* as “Lord’s anointed”,¹²³ is it really possible that an open-minded king such as Husraw himself would not have asked for more details about this remarkable ancestor or that the *katholikós* did not explain to the king this reference, when the name of Cyrus was mentioned at least 23 times in the *Bible*? Very plausibly even Husraw should have known something, because the Christian strategy was that of converting the royal family, and the providential func-

121 Without mentioning the most evident and debated case of the migration of the Western philosophers to Ctesiphon after the closing of the Academy and the other non-Christian philosophical Schools by Justinian in the year 529, I would like just to refer to the striking example of Paul of Persia, and his intellectual and religious career between Zoroastrianism and Christianity, and his close connection with the king Husraw I. See Gutas 1983; Bruns 2009; King 2019: 163-208; Teixidor 2003, *passim*.

122 See Chabot 1902: 320.

123 *Isaiah* 45:1.

tion of the Achaemenians was a too sensible (and usable) subject to be ignored, although the knowledge of these facts and the sources mentioning them did not interfere with the inner religious, ethnic memory, which had other functions and directions for the interest of the Persians. Actually, it was not rooted in an identity and its narrative. For this reason, we may suggest that if elites and ordinary peoples shared a common vision of the sense of their times, in which from Zoroaster to the Sasanians a pseudo-historical line (full of voids) was in any case clear, the level of knowledge were certainly different. The common reconstruction followed a mnemonic re-composition of the past in which some gaps occurred, and the dramatic amnesia we observe can be explained with a number of concurrent phenomena: in particular, a scarce interest for “history” as we think it, increased by a strong reduction of (or even exclusion from) the access to the necessary past sources, united with the succession of different secular powers and their administrations. But the collapse of a public bureaucracy did not produce a total regress. The progressive loss of competence in mastering the Aramaic language, for instance, did not produce total analphabetism in an area of strong orality, but opened the way to many local solutions, which in any case preserved some common patterns visible within the heterographic system.¹²⁴ In reality, our knowledge of the local folklore connected with the western satrapies, closer to the Achaemenian centers is superficial, but for instance, the memories of the Achaemenians preserved in the kingdom of Commagene (see, for instance the inscriptions and the Graeco-Iranian cults of Antiochus of Commagene)¹²⁵ or in the framework of the Magian tradi-

124 See Skjærvø 1995; 1996.

125 See my discussion of the problem in Panaino 2007.

tion that survived in Cappadocia,¹²⁶ show that the situation was much more intricate. Certainly, one can say that these memories were preserved in Greek sources, inscriptions or texts, but we must observe that Greek was one of the languages of area, and that Asia Minor was *par excellence* a region of multilingualism. This is just a small example of the way in which some dialectical phenomena might occur in a period of transition,¹²⁷ in which many gaps took places, but without the effects of a *tabula rasa*.

6. The Precedents and the Framework

At this point, we need to move back for a moment, and consider that a true Parthian era was based on the Seleucid model, while we cannot exactly find a Sasanian era properly operating over a long-term period like the Arsacid era. As noted by Taqizadeh,¹²⁸ despite the fact that some Syriac sources seem to refer to the existence of an “era of Ardašīr” (with a reference to 117 years of Persian rule [= 223/4 CE] in coincidence with the 31st

126 See Weiskopf 1990, and the presentation of the sources. Cf. also Boyce – Grenet 1991: 309-332.

127 We must also consider that the presentation of the Parthian period (although it does not seem to have been explicitly searched), was subjected to a process of ideological redetermination. If the Parthian dynasty was considered inferior, and religiously weak, the alliance with some noble houses that accepted Persian supremacy determined at least some processes of mediation. Within the framework of this dialectic situation, we should also evaluate the treatment of the Arsacid dynasty and the scarce memory of it in later times. Probably, part of the living memory of the Parthians was embedded, *mutatis mutandis*, within the Armenian historiographical tradition. Cf. Schoeler 2020: 518, *passim*.

128 Taqizadeh 1947: 33, n. 1.

year [= 339/40 CE] of king Šābuhr II [309-379],¹²⁹ and few other examples),¹³⁰ the striking proofs underpinning the existence of a proper “era of the Sasanians”, comparable with those of the Seleucids and the Parthians, are comparatively weak. More prudently, we must observe that the Middle Persian inscription of king Šābuhr I, in Bīšāpuhr,¹³¹ was dated, as Gnoli noted,¹³²

to the year 58 of an era that corresponded to the year 40 of the ‘fire’ of Ardašīr and to the year 24 of the ‘fire’ of Šābuhr; that is to say, an era whose epochal year must have been 208/9, or, perhaps more precisely, 205/6.

Thus, we find three different synchronized dates: year 58, year 40, and year 24.¹³³ In this remark, Gnoli was following some other scholars, in particular R. Altheim-Stiel, who was the first to point out the problem.¹³⁴ The beginning of this system of calculation for a Persian dynastic year is very peculiar. In fact, the first date is not connected with the foundation of any Fire, while this symbolic foundation starts only with that of Ardašīr I. In addition, we must remark that this

129 More explicitly, we know that the 31st year of Šābuhr II was 339/40; if we subtract 117 from 339/40, we obtain 223/24. See Ginzler 1906, I: 306, with reference to the Syriac sources. Ginzler also analyses and explains the reasons for the difference with respect to the other date of accession of Ardašīr, usually ascribed to the year 226 CE. Cf. also the long discussion in Taqizadeh 2010: 166-169, n. 14.

130 See Ginzler 1906, I: 306, in particular the note 2. Cf. also Gnoli 2000: 142, 171, n. 54.

131 See Ghirshman 1936; Hansen 1938; Unvala 1952: 25; Nyberg 1964: 124-125; Back 1978: 378-383.

132 See Gnoli 2000: 139. Cf. Herzfeld 1947, I: 11-13, 23.

133 See Back 1978: 378-379. Cf. Taqizadeh 2010: 167-168; Huysse 1999, II: 14-16.

134 See in particular Altheim-Stiehl 1978; 1982; 1985. I must thank Prof. Wiesehöfer for this kind historiographical remark.

system of computation did not exactly correspond to an “era of the Sasanians”, but to the beginning of the Persian reign of Pābag, as local kinglet, probably lord of Khir,¹³⁵ long before Ardašīr could become the *šāhān šāh ērān*.¹³⁶ The crude anticipation of the year 205/6 for the beginning of an imperial era seems to me implausible, and in any case it does not match with the calculation we obtain when we take into account the Syriac figure of 117 years, which brings us to the year 223/4 CE. Probably, the use attested in the inscription of Bišāpuhr could be a sort of homage paid by Šābuhr to his father and founder of the kingdom, although not the eponymous lord of the dynasty who still was Sāsān. Furthermore, this is a different problem, the present epochal year does not match with the 538 (SE) [or 226 CE] of the tradition, and which we should expect for the starting point of Ardašīr’s kingdom (258 + 14 + 266). In that alternative chronology, the beginning of the reign of Ardašīr would correspond to the year SE 530, with a reduction of the other 18 years for the Parthian era (and kingdom). Thus, if we cannot rule out the hypothesis that the first Sasanians had the idea to imitate the Parthians with the introduction of their own era, then it is also possible that Šābuhr I,¹³⁷ who was co-regent with Ardašīr for a few years, simply desired to emphasize the dynastic link with his father, and the unity of their noble home.¹³⁸ While other refer-

135 See Wiesehöfer 2007: 46-47, who assumes that at the same time Ardašīr should have been appointed as king of Darabgird.

136 See Back 1978: 507, n. 249. But it is reasonable to suppose that already since the year 211/12 CE Ardašīr rebelled from Darabgird, and started his campaigns against the Parthian domination.

137 With regard to the enthronement of Šābuhr I, see the discussion offered by Huyse 1999, II: 6-8 with a good apparatus of data and bibliographical details.

138 As Terribili kindly notes (personal communication), we

ences attested in the Syriac sources could be a witness of the fact that the Sasanians knew the length of their kingdom, and that they maintained a good knowledge of their historical chronology, they cannot be invoked as proof of a well-grounded era. All these facts do not confirm the coherent adoption of the system of a true dynastic Sasanian era, which in any case was not adopted, as far as we know, in further official documents, and that in any case cannot be ascribed to the accession of Ardašīr to the simple throne of the Fārs region. On the contrary, other minor Iranian or Iranianized royal dynasties,¹³⁹ such as those of the Bactrians,¹⁴⁰ the Choresmians,¹⁴¹ and the Sakas,¹⁴² tried to imitate the prestigious model of the Seleucid era with their own epochs and calendars. In these cases, the Seleucid pattern (with its figures) maintained an essential role of calendrical anchoring.¹⁴³

In recent times, Kosmin¹⁴⁴ has placed the strongest

should take into consideration the fact that Šābuhr I was the second king of this dynasty, which in reality usurped the power, and that for this reason he had good reasons to emphasize a direct link with his father in his quality of founder of the new royal home. Furthermore, the local political authority, i.e. the scribe Abasā(?), who apparently ordered the redaction of the Bišāpuhr inscription (Back 1978: 381, 507, n. 250) was a dignitary of the town, and thus the reference to the antiquity of the Fire of Ardašīr might find an additional reason in the pride of the territorial elites aiming at emphasizing the Persian local framework, putting a certain importance on the year of ascent of the royal family, which emerged from that regional area.

139 Ginzler 1906, I: 306-307.

140 Sims-Williams – de Blois 2018.

141 See in particular the fifth chapter in Minardi 2015, *passim*. Cf. also Livshits 1968. Cf. again Minardi 2013: 114-118, with some pertinent notes.

142 Salomon 1998: 181-185.

143 Taqizadeh 1939a; 1939b; Kosmin 2018: 19-101.

144 See Kosmin 2018, *passim*.

emphasis on the fact that the Seleucids, for the first time in history, starting with the year 311/12 (after a decision taken by Seleucus I or better, as suggested by many scholars, by his son Antiochus I),¹⁴⁵ created a new chronological system,¹⁴⁶ in which the regnal years of every single king lost their previous importance, while a theoretically never-ending dynastic era assumed a paramount relevance. This new system exercised great influence, representing a radical change in the way of figuring (in any sense) the course of time and its relation with political power. Certainly, the Seleucid era also brought with itself a strong ideological mark, the seal of a Western, foreign, and Greek (and Macedonian) domination,¹⁴⁷ although, particularly in the East, the Mesopotamian, especially Babylonian, heritage of power was never forgotten.¹⁴⁸ A fresh trend in our field has actually shown that the Seleucids preserved a special regard for this Babylonian background, its culture and related educational values,¹⁴⁹ so that their presence did not erase the traditional heritage. For this reason, this new mixture of Greek and Babylonian authority produced a certain impression on the subjected peoples, and in some cases, it met with hostile reception, thus meeting with a certain cultural oppo-

145 See again the fitting consideration expressed by Kosmin (2014: 10-101).

146 The historical process that determined the creation of this new system has been the object of many insightful discussions; see in particular Bickerman 1980: 70-78; Hallo 1984-85.

147 See, e.g., Jouguet 1968; Wideman 2009.

148 Again, I must thank J. Wiesehöfer for having directed my attention to the good preservation of an important cultural Babylonian background within their kingdom. Very useful the book by Primo 2009 about Seleucid historiography.

149 See in particular Haubold 2013; Kosmin 2013. On the role played by the Seleucid literature beyond the limits of the Seleucid area, see Visscher 2020.

sition. This resistance is quite visible in the direct connection of the Macedonian kingdom with the worst period of human history, as clearly witnessed in the doctrine of the progressive decay of the World’s Ages, presented in the *Book of Daniel*,¹⁵⁰ which became a symbol of cultural opposition. Thus, even the system of the Seleucid era, despite its fame and prestige, assumed a negative mark, for instance within the Jewish communities, despite the fact that its adoption was mandatory even for them.¹⁵¹ In this complex framework, the Parthian Hellenism was not blind, and did not forget the importance of the Babylonian tradition, which maintained its prestige and respect. The Parthians, actually, followed the example of the Seleucid era, with its astronomical rules of Babylonian origin, but limited its prestige with a modified imitation, and then

150 I have treated this problem, especially with respect to the Iranian influences, in Panaino 2021a: 75-76; 92-93, 107-112. For a general overview on the problem of the relations between Jews and Greeks, see the classical study by Bickerman 1988. Recently, in Panaino 2021b, I have discussed the subject of the merger of the limited time within the eternal one, but without considering the possibility that in this formulation there was a cultural interface with the Syriac tradition, as visible in particular in the *Book of the Hierotheos* by Stephan bar Sūdailē. It is to be noted that in Syriac the idea of “merger”, very frequent in the speculation of Ierotheos and the Pseudo-Dionysius, was expressed with the term *muz-zuōgō* (m-z-g), which seems to be of Indo-European origin, although with a possible connection to the root *msk*. I must thank Emiliano Bronislaw Fiori for this kind remark. This, for instance, is another example in which a mutual influence is possible, because the Iranian speculations about time were surely older, but the contribution of the Syriac religious culture about the apokatastasis were so relevant that it would be difficult to deny a “mixture” of mutual trends, and the influence of an intercultural dialogue. For further considerations, see Fiori 2011.

151 A pupil of Prof. Wiesehöfer, Dr. Marie Oellig, is currently preparing her dissertation for publication. Her work deals with the history of the system of succession of empires, in which the Hellenistic period is of fundamental importance.

started to calculate the first regnal year of their whole new era putting their year 1 in correspondence to 247 BCE (= SE 64 = PE 1),¹⁵² reasonably in connection with the accession of the founder of the dynasty, i.e. more probably, king Arsaces I (247-217BCE), according to Wolski,¹⁵³ or, alternatively, Tiridates I (ca. 248-211 BCE).¹⁵⁴ This scenario shows that there were complex dialectics concerning the adoption of the new Parthian era, but it is clear that its origin was well known, even in some circles of the Persian districts.

Lewy suggested¹⁵⁵ that, in later times, the Sasanians, according to a certain religious and ideological reconstruction of the world history, would have started to calculate the beginning of the Parthian era only around the year 34 BCE (= 272 SE), so implicitly referring to a new Parthian dynasty, founded by Ardawān II, which took the power at that time. This new line of blood within the Parthians presented a royal list of only 11 kings for a time span of exactly 266 years. Lewy again¹⁵⁶ supposed that thanks to a chronological fitting overlapping among the first accession of this alternative line of the Arsacid royal family (the Aškānān) to the throne in 272 (SE) and the Parthian conquest of Jerusalem (mistakenly associated with Alexander's alleged death in the same city), there

152 About the various eras, see Bickerman 1980: 70-78, and in particular for the Parthian system, p. 72. Cf. Assar 2003: 176. Very useful the study by Korn 2006, and the fresh investigation by Pompeo (forthcoming) about the royal formula adopted by the Parthian kings in their inscriptions in Greek, when they distinguished a date according to the Parthian era: ὡς ὁ βασιλεὺς [βασιλέων] ἄγει "as the King [of Kings] reckons".

153 This is a debated subject that I cannot discuss here in detail. See Wolski 1993: 58-65, *passim*, with bibliography and details.

154 See Bickerman 1973: 79-83; Hallo 1984-85: 147.

155 Lewy 1944: 207-214.

156 Lewy 1944: 212-214.

would have been created a false synchronism, which would justify the (mistaken) reduction of the whole Parthian period.¹⁵⁷

Although I cannot deny that Lewy's solution presents some intriguing supportive correspondences, this interpretation does not explain how an international dynasty such as the Sasanian one would have presented a national history in such a peculiar and imprecise way. In fact, I cannot believe that the Sasanians did not realize that the determination of the time span between Ardašīr I and Alexander's death in only 260 or 266 years (or even 270 as in Agathias) was too short, and that any false synchronism with the Seleucid era would be noted in the empire and abroad as well. If they did, they knew, and there was no mistake, but there was a different calculation or arrangement of past time and royal dynasties.

For instance, from what we know of the Manichaean chronology, al-Bīrūnī (*Chronology*, 118)¹⁵⁸ still preserved good details about some of the most significant dates in the life of Mani, which would belong to his *Šābuhragān* with very reasonable precision.¹⁵⁹ The Persian astronomers contemporary with Mani's time should have had no lesser knowledge than Mani himself of these details,¹⁶⁰

157 The overlapping, as explained by Lewy (1944), between the victorious Parthian campaign against the Romans and the accession of Alexander, like the one between the capture of Jerusalem and the (legendary) sudden death of Alexander in Jerusalem again, as stated in some Arabic sources, such as al-Dīnawari, could have paved the way to a chronology, which considered only the Parthian king of kings in a temporal frame that presented some fitting similarities with the Mazdean reconstruction of the dynastic histories.

158 See Sachau 1878: 118; Sachau 1879: 121.

159 For the pertinent bibliography on this subject, see Gnoli 2000: 174, n. 87.

160 About the Parthian era in astronomical documents, see Kugler 1924: 443-463.

considering that Mani's astronomical competence was very weak.¹⁶¹ Furthermore, how was it possible for the Sasanians to ignore the current use of the practically contemporary Arsacid era? This system was clearly adopted in official documents such as the stele of Xwāsak, the satrap of Susa, appointed by Ardawān, the last Parthian King of Kings. This inscription, discovered in Tang-i Sarwak, was actually dated to “year 426, month of Spandārmāt, day of Mihr” [thus corresponding to September 14th 215 CE].¹⁶² Thus, it is beyond any doubt that the Sasanians, who had been previously vassals of the Arsacids, should have perfectly known the Parthian era and its synchronisms with the Seleucid era in its varieties (and probably with other systems),¹⁶³ so that this kind of knowledge was too evident

161 About the modest astronomical competence of Mani, see Panaino 1997, *passim*. Cf. also Taqizadeh 2021: 126-127.

162 Henning 1952: 176. Terribili (personal communication) rightly reminds me of the importance of the Greek inscription of the Heracles of Bisutun for our discussion (Rougemont – Bernard 2012: 145-148 with a large bibliography). Despite the fact, that it was earlier and in the Greek language, it was visibly dated ἔτους δξρ' = 164 SE (= 148 BCE), and it is doubtful that this fact was completely unknown, being located in one of the most visited places of the Iranian world.

163 We must consider that in the Near East, we can find dates given according to the Parthian era and the Seleucid one. In the case of the Seleucid model, the synchronism was with the Macedonian calendar (starting in fall), or with the Babylonian one, while the year according to the Parthian era and the Seleucid one. Cf. Lehmann-Haupt 1905: 128-30; Minns 1915: 31-36; see also Wells 1934: 301, no. 75. In a superb article Assar (2003) has well shown that the Parthians mastered both systems, so that we have in Babylon dates given according to the SEB (Seleucid era of Babylon), while in Seleucia documents were issued according to the SEM (Seleucid era of Macedonia), with the basic difference of 6 months, and inevitably with a misalignment of one year in some cases. Furthermore, the Parthians introduced some reforms into the intercalary system of Babylonian origin around the year 49 BCE.

for the western enemies of the Persians as well as for the various nations of the Iranian countries. Thus, it is risky to assume that a new chronological system based on this alleged cut of more than two and a half centuries, *eventually occurring by mistake*, could be credited, and that the Persian scribes, officers, and astronomers might have been compelled to use it without a dramatic (and ridiculous) disentanglement from all the other contemporary chronologies. This choice, if so realized, would have produced an additional number of difficulties and mistakes, and its sloppiness would have been considered a so-called “Pulcinella’s secret”, i.e. as a very peculiar and nonsensical fake, which would have escaped nobody’s observation. Actually, no ancient document offering a minimal synchronism supports the historicity of this new system, and the (probable)¹⁶⁴ calendrical reform attributed to Ardašīr I cannot be used as a blanket covering everything. It is really too short for this. At the same time, we can reasonably assume that this kind of operation was highly improbable, at least in the way as it has been suggested, and this would be true in the period of Ardašīr as in that of Husraw I as well. In the case of the latter king, we must recall that he ordered the minting at least of some gold coins¹⁶⁵ (for instance in the 13th year of his kingdom) with the following legend:

Husraw gēhān abēbīm-kardār
 “the liberator of the world from fear”,
 or more literally,
 “the maker of the world fearless”
 (with a nominal compound with a second member as a *no-
 men agentis*).

164 I have already offered some arguments supporting the plausibility that already Ardašīr I made a calendrical reform in Panaino 2002.

165 See Mosig-Walburg 1994; Gyselen 2004: 86, nr. 88, who translated the text as follows: “Khusro, (year) 13, who has made the world without fear”; Daryaei 2020; cf. already Herzfeld 1947, I: 15-16.

This legend was adopted also by Husraw II in the years 33, 34 and 36.¹⁶⁶ Certainly, the “fear”¹⁶⁷ from which the world had been liberated was not that of the end of the millennium, but one of wars, in particular against the Huns,¹⁶⁸ with a number of inevitable political disorders, famine, etc., all calamities against which this king seems to have been able and ready to react to. The declaration of having repelled the fear thus insists on a political and a religious emphasis, whose history is very ancient, because it belongs to a traditional Iranian literary pattern.¹⁶⁹

If the pseudo-exegetical tradition concerning its origin with the recourse to a “secret decision” was based on a doctrine created many centuries later, i.e. after the collapse of the Sasanian Empire, we can rightly wonder whether its creation was much more archaic, but we have no supporting data for this explanation. More probably, the game was less complex and secret, but followed other rules and answered different needs.

166 I must thank Dr. Andrea Gariboldi (University of Trieste) for his advice on these issues and some additional comments. A specific article by him on this monetary series is forthcoming.

167 The Pahlavi stem *bīm* “fear, fright, dread” (cf. also *bīmḡēn* “fearful”, *bīmḡēnīh* “fearfulness”, *bīmōmand* “fearful”; NPers. *bīm*; Balochi *bēm*; Nyberg 1931: 36; Nyberg 1974: 47; MacKenzie 1971: 18) is a nominal derivative from the Indo-Iranian verbal root **bhaiH-* (Proto-Iranian **baiH-*, Vedic *bhay-* “to fear”; cf. also Vedic *bhīmá-* “terrible” (Mayrhofer 1963, [KEWA] II: 471-472; 1996, [EWA] II: 245; see in particular Avestan *b(a)ii-* “to fear, to be scary, scare” on which see Cheung 2007: 3; Bartholomae 1904: 927; Kellens 1995: 38); this verbal root has a good Indo-European etymology, such as **b^heiH₂-* “to fear” (Rix 2001 [LIV]: 72-73).

168 See the direct reference to the passage in *Bundahišn* XXXIII, § 24, where a similar reference to Husraw I as liberator of the Iran from the fear (*ērānšahr abēbīm kard*) is present (Pakzad 2005: 368; Agostini – Thrope 2020: 174). See again Daryaeae 2020.

169 See Panaino 1987; 1991.



7. The Process of Assimilation between the era of Zoroaster and the era of Alexander (= SE)

Despite the fact that the references to the “era of Alexander”, sometimes attested in Islamic sources, are incorrect, as al-Bīrūnī himself noted,¹⁷⁰ and probably depend on Syriac sources, while only the denomination of “Seleucid era” would be the correct one, because it specifies that this chronological system was introduced only after the death of the Macedonian king and officially ascribed to Seleucus I, the decision to link the year 538 of the (original) Seleucid system to the first one of Ardašīr I, and putting its beginning in synchrony with that of the fourth Mazdean millennium had a series of astonishing implications. By the way, I must underline that the adoption of a Babylonian version of the calendar following the Seleucid era, well distinguished (because of six months of difference) from the Macedonian version, clearly shows that the frequent connection of this era with the “Babylonian Astronomers” entailed nothing strange or peculiar. Furthermore, if we assume that the Persians were unaware of the origin of the Seleucid era (a conclusion we cannot subscribe *a priori*), how can we be so sure that its beginning was so well marked and dis-

170 In brief, al-Bīrūnī, in his earlier works, such as the *Chronology*, used to interpret the “era of Alexander” as exactly corresponding to the Seleucid era, while in his *al-Qānūn al-Mas’ūdī*, put Zoroaster exactly 276 years before the “era of Alexander”; al-Bīrūnī would have eventually written a booklet in order to clarify his mistake. See the interpretation of these facts as suggested by Taqizadeh (1939a: 129–130), and the discussion by Shahbazi 1977: 27–29. Cf. also Gnoli 2000, and 2006b. A less known discussion about the different and contradictory references given by al-Bīrūnī himself in his large textual production was offered by Taqizadeh in his Persian monograph (*Gāhšomāri dar Īrān-i qadīm* 1937a), and now can be more easily read in the Italian version by Cristoforetti (Taqizadeh 2010: 188–200, n. 68).



tinguished and the link with Alexander and his (political) descendants carefully rejected? Who were Seleucus I or his son Antiochus for these later Persians? On this matter a certain prudence and openness are both required.

We know that 258 years were attributed to the period between a foundational event in the life of Zoroaster,¹⁷¹ connected with the starting point of the tenth (= fourth) millennium¹⁷² and another one of Alexander's life (most

171 We must note that according to the Pahlavi text *Māh ī Frawardīn rōz ī Hordād* (Grenet 2009: 164), in the list of the most important events that happened during the Nowruz, three can be particularly marked with direct reference to Zoroaster's life. They are in the chapters XXIV-XXVI): 1. [...] *māh [ī] Frawardīn rōz ī Hordād Zarduxšt ī Spitāmān ō wēnišn ud ham-pursagīh ī Ohrmazd ī xwadāy rasēd* "On the day Hordād of the month Frawardīn, Zoroaster the Spitāmīd reaches the vision and conversation of Hohmazd the Lord"; 2. *māh [ī] Frawardīn rōz ī Hordād Zarduxšt ī Spitāmān dēn ī māzdēsnañ az Ohrmazd ī xwadāy bē padīrift* "On the day Hordād of the month Frawardīn, Zoroaster the Spitāmīd received the Mazdean Religion from Ohrmazd the Lord"; 3. *māh [ī] Frawardīn rōz ī Hordād Kay Wištāsp šāh dēn az Zarduxšt bē padīrift* "On the day Hordād of the month Frawardīn, king Kay Wistāsp received the Religion from Zoroaster". Thus, the full reception of the *dēn* is a moment chronologically separated, central and at the same time foundational. The same text (chapter XXX) underlines the difference with the case of the first of the three posthumous Saviors, for whom everything will take place at the same moment.

172 The scholarly debate has suggested different possibilities, such as the 30th year of Zoroaster with the revelation of the *dēn*, his first success, or at 40, when he converted Medyōmāh, or, finally, the conversion of Kay Wištāsp, at the age of 42 years. I personally prefer the first solution, because it follows the triadic scheme, and corresponds to the similar association between the end of the millennium and the age of thirty, which is common to the three posthumous sons of Zoroaster. Additional arguments have been collected, for instance by Gnoli (2000: 152-158), who discussed also other solutions, but I do not follow his theory in all the details, and in particular I think that this interpretation does not *a priori* support the historicity of the 258 years. The comparison also with the destiny of Gayōmart deserves to

probably his conquest of Persia, and/or the death of Darius III = Dārāy ī Dārāyān). Then, we also know that the Persian tradition fixed the length of Alexander’s kingdom into 14 years.¹⁷³ While the Iranian tradition followed the first computation, it is most probable that this figure, as suggested by Shahbazi,¹⁷⁴ was derived from a Babylonian model, where it explicitly appears.¹⁷⁵ The rest was left to the period between Alexander’s death and the enthronement of Ardašīr I (284 years). The problem concerning the origin of this chronological overlapping has been focused on in many ways, but nobody seems to have noted that the figure 258 should have been determined only after the setting of Alexander’s bright star. Thus, this periodicity seems to have been fixed in a phase in which the *di-*

be considered, as shown more extensively below. Within the legendary biography of Zoroaster, we must consider that the *hampursagīh* (“consultation”) takes 10 years, and this time span corresponds to an initiatory and revelation track ending only at the age of 40 years. At that moment, in fact, Zoroaster can bring the *dēn* into the world. Two years later (as precisely stated in the *Pahlavi Rewāyat to the Dādestān ī Dēnīg* XLVI,16 [Williams 1990, I: 168-169; II: 77]), at the age of 42 years, the prophet obtains the full conversion of Wištāsp. Terribili rightly remarks that this addition of 12 years seems to evoke another calendrical and zodiacal symbolism and symmetry, well embedded within the progress of the limited time, although in another perspective 10 and/or 12 years more could be considered as an extension in order to adapt within a temporal sequence of events of an astrological nature conceived and occurring in a closer temporal connection.

173 In reality, it lasted less than 13 years, but his reign has been usually numbered 8 or 7 years. As Parker – Dubberstein (1956: 19, 36) observed, the cuneiform evidence with respect to the period of Alexander the Great is sometimes confused. Actually, two systems were used: one reckoned year 1 of Alexander as beginning in April 3rd, 330 BCE; the latter counted from his Macedonian accession, so that the year 1 was 336.

174 See Shahbazi 1977: 32; Shahbazi 2002: 30-35, 36-39, 42.

175 Assar 2003: 174.

rect knowledge of the Achaemenian history had become very poor,¹⁷⁶ and just limited to a few names. If the figure was so old and deeply rooted in the historical (not the traditional and folklorical) Persian lore, why was it not connected with one of the true Achaemenian kings? More likely, it was created in order to fix a solid span of time between a positive event, marking the beginning of the millennium, as one of the most significant moments of Zoroaster's life and the disaster coming after Alexander's invasion (or something like it). Thus, this figure cannot belong at all to the early Seleucid period, because any Mazdean religious history of the late 4th century BCE would have tried to combine Zoroaster's time, the earlier Iranian mythology of the Kayāniān, and the glory of the descendants of Darius I, whose *res gestae* should have been still recorded and celebrated, at least during those times.¹⁷⁷ On the contrary, we simply observe that the memory of the Gāθic Vištāspa had survived, because it was kept alive by the sacerdotal Mazdean schools reciting in Avestan their secular liturgy,¹⁷⁸ but without any clear

176 I must insist on the fact that Alexander and his generals, despite some episodes of repression and violence, were looking for recognition in Persia, and that some durable forms of cooperation were established, as well shown by Wiesehöfer 2007: 37-38.

177 Various attempts of deducing the presence of a Zoroastrian line hostile to some Achaemenian kings are very uncertain. Its existence implies that there was a Mazdean religious party, closer to the royal house, against a Zoroastrian one, but this antagonistic dialectic is beyond the limits of the data we have access to. In my opinion, if the Avestan liturgy had the opportunity to enter Western Iran (and particularly the Persian region) and thus became dominant in these areas, this means that no real opposition was enacted against its diffusion. We must insist on the fact that without the western written redaction of the Avestan liturgy, endorsed by Persian religious schools, we would have very poor knowledge of the Zoroastrian religion and its eastern background.

178 For the role of Vištāspa within the liturgical millennial

attempt of identification with the historical father of the great Persian king. This potential association, which later excited so many Iranologists in our past studies,¹⁷⁹ would have supported the introduction of a figure of 258 years *before* (the historical) Alexander and the Seleucid era, countering any direct superimposition of the beginning of the millennium of Zoroaster *with* the starting point of the Seleucid era. While the simple problem of the (potential) identity of Vištāspa did not escape Agathias (II,26,1)¹⁸⁰ at his age, a few centuries earlier, the persons who created the Zoroastrian scheme of the fourth millennium seem to have not properly mastered early Persian history. This evidence does not mean that they had no memory of the Achaemenians, but that the tradition of

scheme, see Panaino 2020d.

179 The idea that the father of Darius I might be identified with the *kauui-* Vištāspa of the *Gāθās* is one central point in the reconstruction of the Zoroastrian religion by Herzfeld (1947), and other scholars; see, for instance, already Hertel 1924a: 24-36, although this scholar did not invoke the “traditional date” in support of his later chronology. On the contrary, he considered the Pahlavi accounts on the age of Zoroaster as historically untenable, although Hertel’s use of these sources results in ambiguity a certain extent. On this subject, see already Charpentier 1925: 747-748, 750-752). In another monographic study, Hertel (1924b) insisted on the identification of the Kayāniāns with the Achaemenians, and obviously assumed as certain the identity of the *kauui-* Vištāspa with the father of Darius I. Cf. also Jackson 1899: 150-178; 1928: 17-18, and n. 5. This connection had been already rejected by Spiegel (1887), but supported by Justi (1897: 257-258). It is astonishing to see so great a historian as Olmstead (1933: 313) assume without *caveats* the identity of the two personages; the same point of view was inherited by Debevoise (1938: 4).

180 Cameron 1969-70: 82-83, 94. Cameron observes that the Persian and Islamic sources do not focus on the problem, but we must note that the crossed references to the two Dārāyān living before the arrival of Alexander evokes a very disturbed preservation of fragments of earlier history. Cf. Herzfeld 1947, I: 9.

the earlier Persian kings was pale and generic.¹⁸¹ The access to more detailed (Western) sources became easier only in the Sasanian period, under the intercultural exchange with Greek and Syriac sources, but this happened in a more intricate framework, in which already the Arsacids started a sort of “Achaemenian Program”, which assumed a more aggressive and expansive strength with the Sasanians.¹⁸² This sort of decay in the memorial heritage of the Old Persian dynasty¹⁸³ happened because the people who should have kept alive their records in close connection with the Mazdean history were most probably just priests strongly conversant with an inner liturgical tradition, and not scholars or scribes particularly interested in the preservation of past secular history. They did not care for historical annals and royal chronologies of kings, but were concerned with religious memory, which includes forms of historical knowledge, yet in a different dimension that was not the one typical of a scribe or a member of a bureaucratic administration. In this framework, when they started to re-organize their religious history as part of a millennial system, they had no special respect for foreign comparative historical and chronological systems, but reframed the data at their disposal according to their own perspective. Furthermore, even if they had desired to have a more open vision of the facts, they no longer had access to direct memory and earlier

181 See here the discussion in § 5.

182 See in particular the remarkable study offered by Shayegan 2011.

183 If the preservation of the memory seems to have been limited, we must observe that the presence of a number of graffiti engraved on the blocks of the Harem of Xerxes and on the Tacara of Persepolis, whose age can be placed in the times of the sub-Parthian kings of Persia, shows that these ancestral places were considered “holy”, and that a certain recognition of the past kings of Persia was maintained (Callieri 2006; Wiesehöfer 2007: 47).

records of the Achaemenian times or to a large repertory of sources concerning the Persian past (probably most of them did not read Greek or Babylonian cuneiform sources), and this means that a relevant period of time should have passed between them and the true Alexander. But here we must consider a more complex situation: actually, if the ritual clergy was maintaining the memory and practice of the Avestan liturgy, and consequently, as we may suggest, it was not strictly interested in establishing direct connections with the Hellenistic cultural centers, the Persian world – although provincial until the accession of Ardašīr I – had probably other intellectual circles, not extra-religious, albeit not strictly sacerdotal, such as the ones proper to scribes, chronologists, officers of the administration, translators, interpreters, astrologers/astronomers,¹⁸⁴ etc. This world was not compellingly in

184 We can reasonably presume the existence of a nucleus of professional astrologers in Iran already at the beginning of the Sasanian period, if not already during the Parthian period. This inference is due to the fact that the diffusion of ancient astrology was a phenomenon that started from the East and moved to and fro between Egypt, Greece, and Syria, extending to the Indian subcontinent and involving also the Iranian area. The extremely favorable disposition of the Parthians toward Greek culture and the relevance of astral divination for the royal dynastic cults (see already the most fitting case of the ancient Commagene) made direct access to apotelesmatic techniques developed by astrologers such as Vettius Valens and Claudius Ptolemaeus very significant, and it is implausible that this kind of knowledge was absent in the formative period of Sasanian power. We cannot state that the astrological reports adopted in order to explain the fleet of the young Ardašīr from the hands of Aradawān were already created in the earliest Sasanian period, but it shows that already the first dynast of the new Persian royal house connected his success to a special series of astrological configurations. See Panaino 1994; 2020b; Grenet 2003: 64-71, 108-019, 122, 127-129. With special regard for the existence (or not) of a Middle Persian astrological literature in the early Sasanian period, see Panaino 2020c: 338-339, *passim*.

contrast with the clergy, and presumably received a good instruction in religion too, but their role was different, and the time for assuming a different kind of intercultural vision of the reality was probably accessible, at least in principle, when the Persian dynasty started to raise its head. This observation will turn out to be very important in the reconstruction of some steps of the genesis determining the new Mazdean chronology.

As a general fact we must observe that, if a good memory of the Old Persian Vištāspa and his son, Darius, had escaped the dusts of time, and they still were clearly usable in the early 3rd century CE, no one (using only inner sources at their disposal or an oral background) would have been capable of placing the right span of time between them and Alexander. On the contrary, the crude synchronism between the Seleucid era (probably taken as starting in a relatively remote past) and the beginning of Zoroaster's time involves *de facto* a violent break from the historical plausibility,¹⁸⁵ because Zoroaster's time actually became no more synchronous with that of Cyrus I (even in this invented tradition), while his life was considered as occurring during the century which was originally that of Alexander, or, to be more precise, even a little bit later, despite that the Iranian prophet should have been older than the Macedonian king by 258 years. Thus, we must not only explain the shift and the cut of the Parthian era, which is a minor problem in itself, because it ends in the right time, but the dramatic shift of Zoroaster's time, and with it the one of 258 of Alexander

185 P'jankov (1996: 16) in his article about the date of Zoroaster (see the study by Ognibene in this volume, p. 245) carefully noted that "Later the figure 300/258 was calculated from the beginning of the Seleucid era (312 BC)", but did not infer some inevitable conclusions from this fact, probably because he assumed that this synchronism was later.

himself. The distance between Zoroaster and Alexander is of 258 years, but Alexander's age had been moved on into the future with respect to the reasonable anchoring of the true historical Macedonian king and the end of the Achaemenian dynasty. This conundrum is normally forgotten, while it presents us with a terrible problem.

It is for this reason that another dramatic and tantalizing matter of continuous debate becomes sterile, i.e. whether the direct connection between the beginning of the Seleucid era and the era of Alexander (which is *in se* wrong, yet it was adopted by many Syriac, Byzantine and Islamic scholars) was accepted or not in Iran. The mass of sources and arguments collected in order to demonstrate or refuse its knowledge and diffusion in Iran just show that the matter is highly intricate, but also that many arguments can be forced into one direction or the other. In my opinion, this equation was known, because it is impossible to assume that Iranian astronomers did not have access to Greek and Syriac sources, but this does not demonstrate that it was equally referred to in a systematic way, although in any case, this is not the true problem. If the poor historical Alexander had been dislodged from the end of the fourth century BCE to the end of the first one, which one was the real meaning of this new chronology?

8. The Millennial Sequence: A Working Hypothesis

We may start supposing that the millennial frame was fixed starting from a turning point in which the Persian Mazdeans were keeping a religious tradition concerning Zoroaster and Vištāspa, in which the memory of Darius' Vištāspa was very remote and imprecise, but present in fragments. If so, besides Zoroaster's revelation

to the Gāθic *kauui-* (Pahl. *kay*),¹⁸⁶ a tenuous link between some kings reflecting a mixture of the Kayāniān tradition and a distorted revival of the Achaemenian line of blood descending from Darius, the son of Vištāspa, might still have been maintained. In that way, Dārāy ī Čihr-āzād, and Dārāy ī Dārāyān¹⁸⁷ would have represented a fragmentary echo of a long royal pedigree descending from the most famous Achaemenian king (Darius I) to the last one (Darius III Codomannus).¹⁸⁸ This heritage was maintained not without later interferences, well visible if we consider that Wahman, son of Spandyād, ruling immediately after the mythic Wištāsp, was said to be the same as Ardašīr, father of Sāsān,¹⁸⁹ so that his link with one of the different Achaemenian kings Artaxerxes, most probably the one surnamed in western sources as “Longimanus”, is patent and fitting.¹⁹⁰ Furthermore, it was already Christensen¹⁹¹ who focused on the fact that:

Le caractère artificiel des traditions [...] sur les deux Dārā [Darius] est évident [...]. En donnant à Dārā un frère aîné du nom de Sāsān [...], on a assuré la légitimité de la dynastie sassanide que l'on rattachait, par une généalogie forgée, à la famille des Kayanides. Alexandre étant introduit dans l'arbre généalogique [...], comme le fils de Dārā I^{er} et le frère de Dārā II est devenu un héros digne de la sympathie des Iraniens, contrairement à la conception qui domine dans la tradition religieuse [...].

It is difficult to fix the origin of this forgery linking

186 About the Avestan title of *kauui-*, see my study Panaino (in the press).

187 See Gnoli 2000: 163.

188 See the most recent discussion in Schoeler 2020: 507-508, *passim*.

189 See Terribili 2019.

190 See already Jackson 1899: 160.

191 Christensen 1932: 151-152.

Dārāy and Sāsān, which perhaps goes back to the beginning of the Sasanian dynasty, while very peculiar is the one concerning Alexander, which opened the way to a “de-demonization” of this historical figure.¹⁹²

Certainly, we can find at the same time a connection with an earlier pseudo-history, via that of Artaxerxes, and another one with the following Ardašīr I;¹⁹³ last but not least, a link between Dārāy and Sāsān. Thus, even the most famous Ardašīr I, of course, founder of the new dynasty, with his father, was positioned at a cross-road, binding the remote (and practically forgotten) Achaemenian past with the Kayāniān tradition and the Sasanian royal family. This was certainly not a sound chronological coordination with real history, but the historical disentanglement was bypassed, because a vague historical anchoring was foundational for the edification of a religious and political project. In the reconstruction of this program, we must consider that true history was not at all an important target, but the determination of an ethnic and political role for the future supported by a noble heritage.

I suspect that before the definitive ascent to the throne of Ardašīr, the Persians were preparing their *Reconquista*. They well knew the Parthian era and the Seleucid one, but rejected the first one, because its acceptance would have meant to assenting to a patent subor-

192 Christensen (1932: 151-152) underlined this tradition attested in al-Tha‘ālibī and Ferdowsi according to which Dārāy I (i.e. Darius) would have compelled Philip, king of the Greeks, to pay a tribute and to give in addition his daughter to marry. From this union two sons were born: one was Dārāy II, who became king of Persia after his father’s death, while the latter was Alexander, who inherited the Greek kingdom after the death of his grandfather (i.e. according to this line of descent, king Philip). When Alexander refused to pay tax and tributes to his brother, the war started.

193 See Skjærvø 2000.

dination to the Arsacid dynasty. We may reasonably presume that they started a process of disempowering the ideological meanings connected with the Seleucid and Parthian eras. The Greek power was contrasted, but the Seleucid era could be equally associated with Babylon, a city, which had been vassal of the Persians, and with a community of scribes and astronomers who preserved a certain reputation, independent from the Greeks and the Seleucids. Actually, we know that the designation of “era of Astronomers of Babylonia” was current in Late Antiquity and Medieval times. In this way, the Persians still had the possibility of maintaining a minimal acquaintance with the Babylonian chronicles, and the local astral lore, so that it was possible to connect the longest epoch current in their times and at their disposal (the Seleucid one) with the beginning of Zoroaster’s millennium, although under the condition that their religious history would be completely reshaped, within an invented framework in which the Iranian prophet had shown his superiority with respect to the Babylonian culture.

When Alexander the Great devastatingly entered the sacred Mazdean history, he assumed, in his identity as *gizistag*, “the accursed”,¹⁹⁴ a cosmological role, and was no more just a human king of the past. He became a sort of embodied demon, whose function was part of a millennial drama. Furthermore, we must recall that Alexander became even a “Christian” (*kilīsāyīg*) in the *Zand ī Wahman Yasn* VI,3,¹⁹⁵ and this peculiar attribution, although ideo-

194 Agostini 2017; see Gnoli 2000: 137. Cf. also Yamanaka 1993; Gignoux 2007; Daryaei 2007; Wiesehöfer 2011; Manteghi 2018.

195 See Cereti 1995a: 135 and 152. If the literal meaning of **kilīsāyīg* is that of “ecclesiastic”, because, as already explained by West (1880: 200 in the note 1), it is a Middle Persian derivative based on Gr. *ἐκκλησία*, its semantic connotation cannot be separated from a patent Christian identity. This conclusion was already confirmed by Darmesteter, who orally informed West (*ibidem*) of the fact that for Nēryōsang Skt. *kālaśi-*

logically characterized as his ethnic identity as “Roman”, *hrōmāyīg* (i.e. “Byzantine Greek”),¹⁹⁶ confirms the apparently impossible chronology followed according to the era of Zoroaster,¹⁹⁷ in which the time of the Macedonian invader

yākāh meant “those whose faith is the Christian religion”. This epithet is normally used for Šēdāsp (ZWY VI,3,5,6; Cereti 1995: 141, 160, 198-199); *Dk.* VII,8,2, VII,8,47 (cf. Molé 1967: 80-81; 88-89), but it occurs also with reference to Alexander the Great. West (*ibidem*) focused on this anachronism, observing that from the point of view of a Persian of the Sasanian period Alexander represented the same hostile people coming from the Christian Roman Empire. Now, this anachronistic denomination assumes a new relevance within the present reassessment of the Sasanian chronological system. See also Gignoux 1987: 358, n. 19, and Cereti 1995a: 185. About Šēdāsp, Cereti (1995a: 198-199), did not exclude the earlier suggestion advanced by West (1880: 104, n. 4), who assumed that this character should be identified with the Byzantine Emperor Theodosius, who had defeated the Persian army in a period which could be placed in connection with the end of the millennium of Zoroaster. On the other hand, it is not impossible that behind this mysterious character we could see the *alias* of Alexander himself, as suggested to me by Lorenzo Paoletti (mail of March 25th 2022), and previously supposed by Darmesteter (1892, I: 80-83, 93; 1892, II: xxxviii-xxxix).

196 Schoeler (2020: 508) notes that many “accounts about Alexander are based on the Greek Alexander Romance of Pseudo-Callisthenes”, a work which according to some scholars could have been translated even into Pahlavi in Sasanian times, although Hämeen-Anttila (2018: 46-51) rejects this hypothesis.

197 According to Gershevitch’s interpretation (1995: 7, 28, n. 21) of Henning’s theory, the association between the Seleucid era and the era of Zoroaster was an old phenomenon, and it was not influenced by any preceding Arsacid model. On the contrary, the Parthians “would have hardly introduced an era of their own, had they too believed that SE the ‘Coming of Zoroaster’ as epoch”. This is certainly an interesting consideration, but it is based on an *argumentum ex silentio*; furthermore, this solution does not consider that the beginning of the Parthian era was very close to the true historical period of Alexander and the fall of the Achaemenians and that the temporal shift of so many centuries for the earlier Persian dynasty and Zoroaster would have been impossible at that time.



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was *de facto* placed not very far from that of the birth of Jesus. This observation is supported by a most interesting piece of evidence given by Ṭabari,¹⁹⁸ who explicitly states:

The Persians assert that sixty-five years after Alexander seized Babylonia, and fifty-one years after Arsacid rule began, Mary the daughter of 'Imrān gave birth to Jesus. But the Christians assert he was born to her 303 years after Alexander conquered Babylonia, and that John the Baptist was born six months before Jesus. They report that Mary was pregnant with Jesus when she was thirteen years old [...].

Despite the “objective” peculiarity of this improbable timing of events, its temporal sequence is perfectly fitting within the scheme of the “orthodox” Zoroastrian chronology. In fact, if we assume, as we should, that the acme of Alexander, according to the Persians, was 258 years before the beginning of the Seleucid era (312/11 BCE), i.e. around 54 BC (312-258), the result is not at all incompatible with the year 65 before Jesus’ birth (7th/4th BCE). Of course, this synchronism is historically misleading and incorrect, if we follow a Western chronology and adopt modern models,¹⁹⁹ but it is perfectly sound within a purely Zoroastrian

198 See Ṭabari in the translation by Perlmann 1989 [vol. IV]: 102.

199 Grenet (2015: 112-113) assumes that, according to a peculiar tradition preserved in the *Ayādgar ī jāmāspīg* XVI,38-40, Mihr would be able to block the feminine demon Wad̄jawagān for 496 years (but Agostini 2013: 82-83, 112, 155, 185-186, 191, edits this as 396 years), suggesting that this figure was introduced in order to produce a deceleration of time and to delay the end of the millennium of Zoroaster. I think that this interpretation counters the Mazdean concept of time, as shown in this study, and that the image of the interruption of the regular course of time is not at all clear. In any case, it is possible that this solution could have been invented by persons whose speculations were unorthodox, and based on external cultural patterns. In this case, Grenet himself offers a key for a numerological speculation behind the figure 496, suggesting that if we assume that the tradi-



religious history as it was the one based on the era of Zoroaster. As we can see, this bizarre historical sequence maintains an internal coherence even with regard to the beginning of the Arsacid period, which would start fourteen years after Alexander (65-51 = 14 years), so again maintaining the standard span of time usually attributed in the Pahlavi texts to this invader. Peculiar, as we noted, but sound once more in its fittingness, this evidence confirms the presence of a rationale, although, in later times, even this, for us, improbable sequence, was bypassed, and Alexander, from being a forerunner of Jesus, became one of his followers. *Tout se tient!*

In this new chronology in which (the Pahlavi)

tional date of Zoroaster would be considered as corresponding to the year 569 BCE, the millennium would end around the year 432 CE, but if we add another 496 years, we obtain 928, which is the exact year of the rebellion of Mardāvij. This event, as Grenet suggested in the same study (2015: 111-112), was remarkably important within the framework of the apocalyptic speculations of the later Zoroastrians. Despite the contradiction with the Mazdean conception of time, this possible speculation, if sound, would only show that it was based on direct knowledge of external chronologies, because a Zoroastrian scholar, working with its inner chronological system, in which the date of Zoroaster corresponded to the year 312/311, would have not been able to move back to the year 569 BCE. However, we have another simpler solution in order to frame this story. The text, in fact, states that the female demon was previously imprisoned in the *vara-* of Yima, as declared in XVI,38, so that we can suspect that the time attributed to her imprisonment did not properly belong to the millennium of Zoroaster, but to that of Ĵim (= Yima), so that this reference concerns an earlier phase of the fight between the forces of Ohrmazd and those of Ahreman. If so, there is no need to imagine a contradictory situation or an attempt at delaying the regular course of time. On the other hand, the *Ayādgār* states that the demoness was able to escape, and the struggle with Mihr is mentioned only later, so that it could equally belong to the following millennium. In any case, I cannot find any patent reference to a proper act of interruption of the course of time.

Wištāsp could live 120 years (30 at the end of the 3rd millennium and 90 at the beginning of the fourth), the expectation of life attributable to each king was not a serious problem, and this shows the fact that we are out of any proper historical chronological framework, but within a cosmic dimension. A closer look at these data equally reveals that, when the doctrine of the Iranian millennial system had already been established (and we can frame its introduction during the later Achaemenian period, in a phase when the Avestan liturgy and a reformed Mazdean calendar,²⁰⁰ following an Egyptian-like system with 365 days, had entered also into western Iran, as previously postulated also by Henning), its fabrication might interplay with historical chronology in a mythical way. For all these reasons, I suggest that the creation of the equation between the era of Zoroaster and the Seleucid era was received and accepted as a very useful “astronomical” and cosmological epoch, without any special emphasis on its Seleucid origin, which in any case should have been known. I suppose that this synchronic equation might have been established in Persia already in the early years of the kingdom of Ardašīr I, perhaps even before his ascent to the imperial power, when Staxr and other Persian centers were still in a condition of relative marginality, and autonomous development, but under the rising impulse toward a national revival in which a relevant millennial role was attributed to the determination of a well-fixed starting point in the past history. There was no Parthian or Seleucid exaltation, but just a chiliadic pattern based on a pseudo-historical adoption of an existing chronology derived from a tradition probably received and preserved as astronomical, despite its origin, then allegedly neutral, and certainly not ideologically denoted and marked openly. In a few words, I deny

200 See Cantera 2017; Panaino 2017.

that the Persian elites did not know what they were doing, and consequently I must refuse the assumption that they would have simply committed a mistake or changed the chronology because of a millennial fear of the future. Their problem was the present, and the determination of their role within it while marching to victory. A cycle of astronomical years, embedded into a millennium placed under the opening authority of Zoroaster's revelation (in one way or another),²⁰¹ in which the real time of Alexander was taken by the prophet, and the older Iranian dynasties (such as a synthesis of Kayāniāns and Achaemenians) covered the age of Alexander and the Seleucids. Despite the scarce sympathy of the Sasanians for their Iranian predecessors, the Arsacids were now inserted within a process of theological and historical redetermination of the millennium. That dynasty too was attributed with a positive role and connected with the process of recovering the earlier Mazdean liturgical tradition. This was not at all a historical chronology, but a religious presentation of the journey of the *dēn ī māzdēsn(ān)*, foundational with respect to the role of the new Persian dynasty. Thus, it is reasonable to imagine that with his ascent to the power, Ardašīr I and his entourage not only favored an improvement of the calendrical system, but also gave further impulse to the determination of an inner religious chronology. This chronology was not adopted as a new official era, but it worked only as an internal reconstruction of the historical development of the *dēn* toward the final triumph of Ohrmazd. Within this framework, the disposition of great dynastic periods in cycles lasting about 240/260 years each is not peculiar at all, in particular if we consider that the shift or transit from one astrologi-

201 In this case it is not particularly or compellingly important if the beginning was that of the 30 years of the prophet or the year of the conversion of Wištāsp, when Zoroaster was aged 42.

cal triplicity to the following one within the millennial²⁰² cycle of the conjunctions of Jupiter and Saturn,²⁰³ took place in a cycle of 238 or (in rare cases) 258²⁰⁴ years, according to the mean motions of these planets. This was an astronomical pattern through which the history of the world was explained, at least according to the Iranian historical astrology of Late Antiquity, which exercised its enormous influence on the later Arabo-Islamic and Mediaeval forms of astrology. Prudence and respect for the complexity of the sources forbid me to state *a priori* that this is the true key for the origin of the figure of 258 years, but I must call readers' attention to this striking evidence, which cannot be ignored.²⁰⁵

202 About the direct connections between Mazdean millennialism and the cycle of the Jupiter – Saturn conjunctions, see Kennedy – Pingree 1971.

203 See Kennedy 1964; Pingree 1968; Panaino 2009a; Buscherini 2013.

204 The computation of the cycle was assumed to make 258 years instead of 238 years (according to the presumed mean motions), if the first conjunction in a new triplicity had taken place within the first grade of the zodiacal sign; cf. now Heilen 2020.

205 Terribili (personal communication) rightly observes that the temporal sequence of Alexander – Ardašīr was placed within a general framework following the patterns of historical astrology, and produced a coherent series of heroes and anti-heroes, such as Zoroaster, Alexander, and Ardašīr, each one as a bringer of crucial changes. In their turn, the Sasanians assumed the role of starters of a new epoch of political ascent for the Iranians, and Ardašīr occupied a central place within the millennium, in a zenithal position. The rationale behind the manipulation could be based on the alliance between a real Iranian historical memory and an adaptation to the astrological schema of the planetary conjunctions, so that the elites, which elaborated the date of Zoroaster, would have cut one of the two middle conjunctions of Jupiter and Saturn (238 or 258 years) lying between Alexander and Ardašīr. This sequence, in fact, would have disentangled an ideal process of up and down in the sequence of the cycle.



9. The Priests and the Astronomical Circles: An Intellectual Framework

For a long time, I have been thinking about the pattern that might inspire or influence the subdivision of the Religious Mazdean chronology of the *Bundahišn*,²⁰⁶ in which the millennium of Zoroaster begins with the period covering 90 years of Wištāsp (in the new millennium), while the ancestral Iranian/Persian kings continue for a total of 258 years, followed by Alexander, and then by the Parthians. This sequence is interesting and original in the fact that practically it ignores the Seleucid and other Hellenistic dynasties and puts Alexander as the last of the Kayāniān/Achaemenian kings. For this reason, inevitable is the comparative search for parallel or similar examples.

The only chronology that had the chance to have been known in antiquity between the East and West, and which exercised enormous importance in astronomy and chronology, was the one adopted by the most prestigious astronomer and astrologer of late Antiquity, Claudius

Again, Terribili notes that an evaluation of the dates offered by Ṭabari (see the translation by Bosworth 1999, vol. 5: 2), gives a very fitting numerical correspondence. The computation of the period in between the takeover of the power by Alexander and the one by Ardašīr is of 523 years for the Christians and “the ones who are in possession of the ancient scripts”, while for the Magians it is 266 years. If we subtract from 523 (i.e. the figure as exactly conceived in that period) the 266 years mentioned in the same passage, we have 257. In Ṭabari (Perlmann 1987 [vol. 4]: 101), the figure 523 is connected to a list of ten Arsacids for a total amount of 475 years. Within the process of reconstruction of the millennium of Zoroaster, the fusion with an era of Seleucid and Babylonian astronomical origin and the redetermination of the assets of a cosmological chronology establishing a foundational presentation of the historical evolution in harmony with the astronomical cycles assumed a paradigmatic meaning.

206 See Gnoli 2000: 157-157; Shahbazi 2002: 15-17. Cf. Herzfeld 1947, I: 8-9.



Ptolemaeus, i.e. Ptolemy (2nd c. CE), based on the so-called *Chronicle of Nabonassar* (-746 = 747 BCE).²⁰⁷ This chronology was very ancient and its current use, although debated to some extents by modern scholars, played a certain role in Babylonian astronomical computation even in Seleucid and later times.²⁰⁸ Ptolemy, who frequently gave direct reference to regnal years of single kings, later published a list of kings, whose title was known as *Canon Basileion*, “Canon of the Kings” (or τὸ προκανόνιον τῆς τῶν ἀπὸ τῆς ἐποχῆς βασιλείων χρονογραφίας).²⁰⁹ This *Canon* usually appears in the introduction to the *Handy Tables* (Πρόχειροι κανόνες), later improved and extended by Theon of Alexandria (305 – 405 CE), and it has been transmitted to us via the Byzantine tradition, which amplified and enlarged the lists of the dynasties.²¹⁰ Earlier references to this *Chronicle* circulated in Greek and Akkadian, but probably also in an Aramaic version, so that it had various ways of diffusion. Authors such as Berossos (beginning of the 3rd century BCE) quoted and referred to it,²¹¹ so that it was not a rare esoteric source. Furthermore, it was connected with practical needs, and it is for this reason that it was attached to the *Handy Tables*, whose utility was highly recognized

207 Neugebauer 1984: 11; Cohen 1993: 6; Depuydt 1995; Waerzeggers 2012. Cf. already Ginzel 1906, I, 138-147.

208 Hallo 1984-85: 148-151; Rochberg-Halton 1991.

209 Neugebauer 1984: 9-14. Useful presentations in Ginzel 1906: 138-147, 149) and Kubitschek (1928: 57-63); Usener 1898: 357-455. Cf. also Varona 2018.

210 See Halma 1822: 139-143; unfortunately this *editio princeps* is defective and based on corrupted mss copies, but there is no better edition at the moment. Thus, the tables reproduced at the end of this volume, taken from Halma's version, are simply given in order to offer an idea of this chronological tool. A new edition of the “Royal Canons”, based on a deep scrutiny of better sources, is currently under preparation by Olivier Defaux.

211 Ginzel 1906, I, 144, and n. 3.

in the ancient Hellenistic world and even later (see below the Tables in the Appendixes). For this reason, considering the interest in astrology in the Parthian and early Sasanian kingdoms, we can presume that we are speaking of a document presumably accessible (in one way or another) to Iranian astrologers and chronologists. The list of the *Royal Canon* is very interesting: it is divided into groups of dynasties: the first of the Assyrian and Babylonian kings from Nabonassar to Nabunaid (-746 to -554);²¹² then we find the Persian kings from Cyrus to Alexander (i.e. from -537 to -331). Then, we have a new list of the Macedonian kings, starting with Philip, as successor of Alexander the founder, followed by Alexander II and then the dynasty of Ptolemy; the last one of this line was Cleopatra (-51). At this point, we find the Romans, etc. It is clear that from the point of view of a Persian observer, the “Romans” and the “Ptolemies” were not particularly significant, in particular with respect to their own sacred chronology. The Achaemenians were certainly more fitting, but memory of them was weak, although it was still possible to recognize the presence of three different kings named “Darius” and two Artaxerxes. Their list was concluded with Alexander. In this respect, the Iranian series, equally ended by the demonic Alexander, found a corresponding precedent, while the absence of the Seleucids in the Iranian tradition follows their omission from the *Royal Canon*, which offered a chronological example beginning already in the 8th centu-

212 Conventionally, the “Era of Nabonassar” starts with the 26th of February, 747, B.C.E. Cf. Kugler 1924: 362-371. For all these dates, I follow the conversions given by Toomer (1984: 11), which have been computed according to the Julian date of the beginning of the reign. N.B. The year indicated with a minus (-) before it (e.g. -746) does not correspond to the one indicated with the current chronological notation BC, which in that particular case would be indicated as 747 BC. The difference of one year is due to the fact that the first is an astronomical notation, in which the year 0 (= 1 BC) is regularly computed.

ry BCE. The Roman dynasty, starting with Augustus in -29, would reasonably correspond to that of its direct Oriental enemies, the Parthians, in the reduced Mazdean chronology similarly beginning from the end of the 1st century BCE. The problem of the explanation for the radical shift of the ancient Persian period down to the beginning of the Seleucid era can be reasonably given only if we suppose that the list of the Persian dynasty ending with Alexander took the place of the Macedonian-Egyptian one, which was meaningless from the Persian point of view.

I do not want to venture into a risky hypothesis, but I believe that it is not implausible that the new millennial frame arranging the time of Zoroaster in a synchronic agreement with the epical period of the Kayāniān dynasty (whose line was practically mixed with the rest of the Achaemenians), and the following aggression of Alexander generated a sort of annalistic catalogue. This process should have taken a certain benefit from other existing general chronologies, in particular those fitting for astrological and astronomical computations covering very long periods of time, exactly as it was the case of the *Chronicle of Nabonidus*. Of course, nothing can be proven as certain, but the pieces of the puzzle can eventually be reasonably put together.

10. And the Parthians?

The theory developed by H. Lewy²¹³ about the fact that the year 40 CE determined a very remarkable turning point in the Parthian chronology is certainly pertinent to our investigation. After 258 years + 14 years (Alexander's kingdom), i.e. in 272 years, a very fitting concourse of events took place. In fact, in 272 SE = 40 BCE, Pacorus led a successful campaign against Palestine, culminating with

213 Lewy 1944: 200, *passim*.

the conquest of Jerusalem.²¹⁴ The great Seleucid kingdom had already fallen in the year 64 BCE, reducing its power to Syria and Eastern Cilicia, and the incoming Roman power was probably not yet so well distinguished, although the Parthian victory of the year 40 (with the following enthronement of Antigonus I as king of Judaea) was considered a significant secular event. Certainly, the symmetry between the Seleucid era and the era of Zoroaster does not link *only* their beginnings, but approximately proposes a fitting correspondence *also* in the case of the synchronism between the end of the Seleucid kingdom (in 64 BCE) and the end of Alexander’s life, to which we must add the beginning of the Roman period in the *Chronicle of Nabonidus*. These correspondences become striking if we compare them with the conquest of Jerusalem by Pacorus, and with the tradition assuming that Alexander died there. While Lewy suggested that these and other wrong synchronisms were established by mistake only in the early Sasanian period, I prefer to think that we have to do with an “invented tradition”, in which a provincial Persian clergy, reframing a proper chronology, established the millennial history of Zoroaster and his followers, finding also a proper place for some of the ancient dynasties, perhaps using a profane knowledge coming of the tradition of the astrologers who had at their disposal other chronologies. This process was surely developed long after the Achaemenian kings and Alexander, whose memory and real history was stuck in the confused darkness of a legendary past.

More precisely, we can suspect that, while Zoroaster’s acme took approximately the place of Alexander’s victory, in coincidence with the beginning of the Seleucid era, considered as the era of the Macedonian kings and invaders, the end of the Seleucid kingdom became the most

214 See Neusner 1999: 29-31,34-36, 75.

fitting date for the displacement of the “Ahremanic” Alexander, as imagined within the Iranian Mazdean folklore. Thus, the creation of this new religious chronology was not interested in keeping alive a solid synchronism and a comparative calendrical system: it was not *historically* and *synchronically* oriented, although it might have used general ideas coming from chronographic and astronomical competences, but rooted in a teleological millennial expectation. In a few words, more prominence was given to religious cosmology than to secular history. External chronologies and official calendars were surely known, but their knowledge and practical adoption, confirmed by the paradoxical synchronism with the (now neutralized) Seleucid era, reduced to the “era of the Astronomers of Babylonia”, did not interfere with the determination of a foundational teleological history. This was a religious truth, arranged in order to pave the foundation for the continuation of the millennium. The Parthians, with their defeat of the Seleucid dynasty and their victories, and their resistance against the Romans, were embedded into this line, although in a subordinate position. When the Sasanians seized power, they should have already developed a basic millennial scheme, with some inner syncretistic associations, which were established a long time in the past, and finally defined in the time of the Persian insurgence, and certainly not elaborated anew in a few days and for the fear of the future. This fact would explain why it was possible to manage different systems at the same time,²¹⁵ without shocks or ridiculous receptions abroad. Probably, the millennial Mazdean system was not a matter of external propaganda or comparative calendrical calculation: it had a mean-

215 We can recall, following Shahbazi (2002: 20-21), that the Zoroastrians knew at least four different dates for their prophet, and that Mas‘ūdī mentioned some alternatives solutions.

ing inside the *Ērānian* culture. In any case, its formal link with the (original) Seleucid era, although completely reframed, permitted an immediate recognition of the present and future different chronologies, despite the patent misalignment. The true historical past, full of historical enemies and foreign dynasties was less important. An exact knowledge of past history was for the few, and these few knew how to manage the inconsistencies of an older tradition, which was meant to ruin the prestige of Alexander and his descendants, and emphasize the roles of Wištāsp and Zoroaster. In an era founded by the Seleucids, the Persians took their revenge by excluding their memory from the common heritage, and proposed a time sequence that was pertinent only from an innermost Iranian perspective. The roots of this operation grew up when Persia was still on the borders of a global crossroad or just at the beginning of its (new) rising orbit, but this attempt, when times were mature, worked quickly when the new dynasty took power and, again, it worked later, at least within the limits of an internal tradition, of course invented in order to explain the past and to establish a future perspective.

The way it was re-embedded into a depressive and dark perspective is another step, the final result of a new, dramatic invention, which emerged only after the Sasanian period (or in proximity of its fall). The role attributed to the Parthians shows that the final arrangement was fully determined after this dynasty was defeated, but they were not humiliated, because even their ancestors could be projected into the Kayāniān past, and conflated with some of them. Practically, the Persians created a sort of proper inter-temporal period, in which the Seleucids, Ptolemies, Parthians and the ancestors of the Sasanians became all quasi-contemporary of the

Achaemenians and even antecedents of Alexander.²¹⁶

This was not history, but a semi-mythological narration, something looking like an internal reconstruction of a proper memory, although framed into a millennial chronological perspective presented as an inner teleological history. Certainly, the Parthian heritage was not completely lost, and despite the so-called “Persian amnesia”, Islamic literature was able to recover texts such as the *Testament of Ardawān*,²¹⁷ which belongs to a tradition with a pre-Islamic background.

11. The Optimistic Zoroastrian Theology and the Apocalyptic Mazdean Perspective

The sources we have briefly considered about the shortage of the millennium confirm one evident fact, i.e. that after the fall of the Sasanian Empire, the millennial perspective entered under the shadow of a general depressive atmosphere of distress and humiliation, and the expectation of an apocalyptic change was increasing. This negative orientation, however, cannot be simplistically projected backwards onto the victorious past times of the Sasanian dynasty, especially at its beginnings, when success and glory were at hand. To clarify this matter is a crucial point, which we will soon discuss in this study.

In addition, various arguments collected against the existence of a genuine Zoroastrian apocalyptic tradition²¹⁸ in a remote antiquity show the weakness of any a

216 Taqizadeh (1947: 39) recognized this absolute disentanglement from real history, but did not consider its real implication under the supposition that the wrong synchronism was simply due to an error.

217 See Grignaschi 1973b: 35, n. 2, 117-118, 146.

218 See already Gignoux 1985-88; 1986a; 1986b; 1987; 1990; 1999; Cereti 1995a; 1995b; 1995c; 1996.

priori assumption that early Mazdeism already presumed the arrival of a series of catastrophic events in connection with the turn of every millennium.²¹⁹ This idea is partly based on a later dramatic apocalyptic presentation of Persian life after the fall of the Sasanian Empire, and it is frequently subject to a number of misunderstandings. For instance, the fact that the sun was compelled to stop at the zenith every time that one of the three posthumous sons of Zoroaster turns 30 years is not to be regarded as a positive event, as sometimes it is presented, even in certain Pahlavi documents.²²⁰ Indeed, this action was produced by a demoness trying to delay the course of time before Ahreman’s final defeat.²²¹ But

219 As Agostini (2013: 152-160) and Grenet (2015: 104-105) have well surveyed in their studies, many scholars have underlined the presence of later Sasanian or even post-Sasanian elements in the apocalyptic events lamented within the Pahlavi literature. We can start with Czeglédý (1958), who focused on the image of the usurper Wahrām Čōbīn (590-591), who assumed the characters of a popular hero, or with Destrée (1971) and later Cereti (1996), who emphasized the references to the actions developed by the sons of Yezdgerd III in order to obtain the direct support of the Chinese Empire against the Arabs. More fittingly, Gignoux (1987: 362-264, 372-374) identified the colors of the armies mentioned into the *Zand ī Wahman Yasn* as referring to the troupes of Abū Muslim (black) or to the Khurrāmiyya rebels, a later Mazdakite sect, whose color was red. These references could be referred to events happened around the year 840. Furthermore, Daryaei (2004) has supported Gignoux’s suggestion showing that two passages from the *ZWY* (VI,3-10 and VII,11-12) directly refer to the battle of Zibatrah, which took place in the year 839. On this subject, Grenet (2013: 137-139, n. 29) has added some supportive contributions, which confirm the later framework in which these events should have happened, framing them within the years 840-879.

220 This happens, for instance, in the *Bundahišn* XXXIII,35, 39, 41, see Panaino 2018; cf. Agostini – Thrope 2020: 175; see also Agostini 2017.

221 Panaino 2018.

despite this evidence, many scholars (as well as some Zoroastrians of the post-Sasanian period) have considered these *monstra* as hopeful signs, probably under the influence of the Biblical tradition.²²² Only the victory of the sun against the Druj is positive, and the continuation of its motion upward, not the blockage of the luminary.²²³ This example, to which we will refer again with regard to the Zoroastrian concept of time, can be framed in the confusion we frequently face, when early Iranian (probably only Young Avestan) eschatology with its millennial doctrine was intermingled with two different, and opposite, theological trends: one of apocalyptic origin, the latter of apokatastasis orientation. Notwithstanding the intrinsic opposition between these doctrines, we observe their mixture within the later Pahlavi literature, a fact practically ignored in our bibliography as the foundational relevance of the apokatastasis,²²⁴ whose theological density normally has escaped serious discussions in the pertinent Iranological literature. In any case, it would be an enormous mistake to frame everything in a remote early Iranian past, because the Mazdean religion inevitably knew a progressive change, and reacted with internal ideas to influential foreign doctrines.²²⁵ In my opinion, it

222 See the *Book of Joshua* 10, 12-13.

223 For instance, the inference that the shortage of the time attributed to the year, the month and the day in Lactantius XVI,10, and in the *Zand ī Wahman Yasn* IV,16 and 64 (see Grenet 2015: 136), has the same meaning is untenable. In the Mazdean framework, the shortage of time would be a positive event, because it anticipates the end of the “mixture” and the arrival of the final resurrection. If the motif circulated, the Mazdean perception of time was different, and if we postulate that this event was negative also in the Zoroastrian sources, this means that it is an external element, not an original doctrine. On this subject, see for more details Panaino 2021a.

224 Panaino 2016; 2017; 2021.

225 Panaino 2021.

is clear that, within a very difficult historical frame, the doctrine of the apokatastasis responded to the teleological scope of the Mazdean Religion, and offered a positive solution, compatible with earlier Iranian millennialism, to the fight against Ahreman. In its turn, the apocalyptic doctrine was superimposed as a special framework placed around the fourth millennium, in which all the relevant events of the imperial Zoroastrian past were compressed. The alternation between the highest successes of the Achaemenian and Sasanian Empires and their subsequent collapses required a theological explanation, and this situation favored the diffusion of an apocalyptic doctrine with its refreshed Late Antique revival.²²⁶ This double reference is due to the fact that, in my opinion, this kind of trend had two phases: the first one started to circulate already after the collapse of the first Persian Empire; the second one emphasized earlier trends and ideas after the fall of the Sasanians. Thus, we must not only try to scrutinize what can belong to an old background from what is later, but also distinguish what really was an older Mazdean tradition with respect to later Zoroastrian elab-

226 Although the whole theory advanced by Eddy (1961) that the earlier apocalyptic trends in the Mazdean framework were initiated by the Fratarakās in Persia (in the framework of a specifically anti-Alexander climate) cannot be exactly followed in its entirety after the pertinent studies of Wiesehöfer (1994: 129-136; 2007: 42-43) about the development of the local dynasties in Persia, I must observe that the problem can be presented under a different light. The priestly role of the Fratarakās, which has been rightly denied by Wiesehöfer, is not necessary for the elaboration of an apocalyptic trend, in which foreign ideas might enter and find an audience among the Mazdean clergy and the local people. The progressive ascent of the priestly and royal dynasty connected with the temple of Staxr perhaps indicates an inner change in the Persian attitude, but also in this framework the apocalyptic depressive atmosphere should have been overcome by a new desire for revenge and triumph.



orations based on external traditions, whose impact was, in their turn, chronologically differentiated.²²⁷

In the case of the Arabic sources we are discussing here, it is very important to note that Mas‘ūdī attributed the creation of a “reduced” chronology to Zoroaster himself, who would have personally stated²²⁸ it in the *Avesta*, so affirming that a fatal event after 300 year from

227 As I have already remarked in some of my previous works, I do not deny that the Iranian world exercised important influences on Near Eastern religious traditions, such as Judaism and Christianity, but this kind of influence must be seen and explained within the framework of a process of mutual exchange, favored by the Achaemenian space and the following Hellenistic phase. I have collected numerous evidences in Panaino 2017b and 2021a. In this respect, the reconsideration of the problem of the origins of the apocalyptic trends, as presented by Grenet (2013), needs further discussions.

228 Unfortunately, it is difficult to understand if Mas‘ūdī precisely meant that Zoroaster was committing his doctrine to a *written* text or to an *oral* transmission, but in any case, it is the idea of a canonized Avestan text, which is obviously anachronistic for Zoroaster’s time. As Terribili remarks, for the late Sasanian tradition, Zoroaster received the revelation as *abestag ud zand*, imagined as a complete canon (albeit a clear distinction between a written and oral form was not clearly marked). In the framework of the developments of late antiquity religious thought, very probably the image of the prophet as a Mazdean *Religionsstifter* increasingly assumed the aspects of a νομοθέτης (“legislator”). In this function, he appears not only in the Graeco-Roman oracular tradition, but also in the Manichaean one, as recently confirmed by Dilley (in Gardner – BeDuhn – Dilley 2021: 102). Terribili again emphasizes the fact that the passage of Mas‘ūdī matches with a preceding one (Carra de Vaux 1896: 131-133), where Zoroaster brings to Wištāsp the book of the *Avesta* composed of 21 chapters. Mas‘ūdī precisely mentions some Avestan sections. Furthermore, Mas‘ūdī attributed to the prophet the invention of a proper alphabet (*dēn debīreh*) and the redaction of a translation with a commentary (*zend – pāzend*), later scattered and dispersed by Alexander. Practically, the text repeats the scheme contained in the fourth book of the *Dēnkard* about the transmission and dispersion of the sacred tradition.



his age would have produced the collapse of the Persian (i.e. Achaemenian) Empire.²²⁹ Later, after the completion of this minor cycle of 300 years that empire would have been reversed and ruined, but the strength of the “Good Religion” would have still survived; only with the turn of a full millennium (after Zoroaster) would the Persian collapse have been total. This source not only knows, but also explicitly establishes, a direct fatal relation between the (first) collapse of the Achaemenian Empire and that of the Sasanian one (i.e. the second one). This historiographical presentation has nothing which is archaic and properly Iranian, because the evocation of the Achaemenian royal family and its whole kingdom is only indirectly and confusedly referred to in the Sasanian sources,²³⁰ which normally bypass it, so that the dramatic link here indicated more probably reflects a sort of astrological fatalistic history, impossible without the supportive help of Greek and Syriac historiography in its background. This element certainly shows that Mas‘ūdī’s reference does not concern a doctrine strictly neither early Iranian, nor early Sasanian. Another suspicious reference is the attribution to Zoroaster of the act of committing a doctrine to the written *Avesta*, a fact that reflects a kind of sensibility not genuinely Mazdean, but external. This evidence does not prove that the Mazdeans could not create such an anachronism, but that the image of Zoroaster as the author of the whole *dēn* is not at all convincing from our point of view, this kind of textual reconstruction being absolutely impossible. Certainly, this legacy was attributed to him in later times, under a different sensibility.

229 This tradition seems to reflect a re-elaboration of the myth of Yima and the triplication of the earth. See Panaino 2012 (with additional bibliography, and below in the note 192).

230 See already Nyberg 1938: 34.

12. Some Implausible Realia in Mas‘ūdī’s Story in Light of Zoroastrian History

Reading the presentation of the facts as given by Mas‘ūdī in his divulgence of the historical secret of the Sasanians, we soon smell the presence of a patent fake.²³¹ The real problem for us, therefore, is whether the invention of this story was Sasanian or later, because certainly it cannot genuinely be of early Mazdean (= Young Avestan) and/or Achaemenian origin. Firstly, we can start with the impossible existence of a millennial doctrine already during the supposed (Gāθic) period of Zaratuštra, who would have directly committed it to writing. This story is beyond any plausibility, and we do not need to discuss it further, simply because we cannot find sources supporting its earlier elaboration. Thus, even if one believes in the historical existence of the prophet, “this” Zoroaster (as presented here) is in any case the one belonging to the later Mazdean chronology, although no Zoroastrian source attributed to him the explicit foundation of the chiliadic doctrine, which was a Young Avestan elaboration.²³² Secondly, the attribution to Zoroaster of a proph-

231 This observation does not mean that the whole passage (see Carra de Vaux 1896: 130-153) is a fake, or that Mas‘ūdī did not consult real Mazdean sources and traditions.

232 To my knowledge, only Herzfeld (1947, I: 2-3) assumed that already in the *Gāθās* we should find millennial ideas, although he suggested that, in this case, the pattern would have followed a triadic scheme, based on three series of three centuries and corresponding millennia (for a total of nine millennia). Thus, the original scheme would have been that of 9,000 years, and not 12,000, which would be of Babylonian origin. I do not exclude that the early Proto-Indo-Iranian and Hittite image of the race course compared to a millennial (or secular) turn could have inspired certain seminal concepts underpinning the Mazdean idea of ritual time, but the millennial model is patently linked to the motion of the heavens, and the role played by

ecy concerning the fall of the Achaemenian Empire (and with it, of the Mazdean “Religion”) is completely anachronistic and must be surely listed among the prophecies *post eventum*. Thus, this legend is nothing but a later invention, in which we find a very interesting comparison between the parallel fall of the ancient Persian Empire and that of the Sasanian Empire. This is a kind of link that sounds to have been established only after its occurrence, certainly not before! This fatalistic comparison might be eventually attributed to Persians with a good knowledge of past history (i.e. persons having access to international sources and comparative chronological tables) or to Arabic and Syriac writers, observing the decay of a past empire, or even to both (academic) communities. In that case, the intellectual environment where such a doctrine might have found its practical development seems to have been that of the circles of professional astrologers, already conversant with the seminal idea of an astrological world history, the theory of the Saturn-Jupiter Conjunctions, and so on. These circles had an open access to international literature and knowledge, and were probably highly cooperative with the secular powers and with some priestly communities as well. Thus, the chronological relevance of astrological doctrines such as the present one, is confirmed, for instance, by al-Bīrūnī (*Chronology*, 213),²³³ who noted in a relevant passage, already mentioned above,

the *frauuāšis* after the attack of Anjra Mainiiu. This is certainly only a Young Avestan doctrine, and we have no way to antedate it in the Old Avestan literary tradition. Furthermore, the representation of the monthly lunations, and the acquaintance with a basic year of 12 months was not only and strictly a Mesopotamian doctrine, but this kind of knowledge was common also among the Indo-Iranian peoples. Thus, there was no compelling reason to restrict to Babylonians the relevance of the number “twelve”, which in any case is a good multiple of “three”. See Panaino 2019a; 2019b.

233 Sachau 1878: 213-214; 1879 197.

that some people expected the restoration of a Mazdean kingdom in connection with the 18th Saturn-Jupiter conjunction after the birth of Muhammad.

Then, it is plausible that a pessimistic speculation attributed to Ardašīr I the original formulation of a preventive reaction against a presumed (but invented) ancestral Zoroastrian doctrine concerning the arrival of a fatal event at the turn of every millennium. The problem is to demonstrate that he himself really did this, which – as shown in this study – is highly implausible, if not impossible altogether. Certainly, the patterns underpinning this chronological fake have nothing which is early Iranian, while only the mechanic disentanglement from the course of real history can be framed around the beginning of the Sasanian period, when the Seleucid era was transformed into an astronomical era, being neutral, and suitable for a new formulation of Mazdean teleology. On the contrary, the fatalistic doctrine of the cyclical ruin of the Iranian secular power could have been created only *post eventum*, i.e. in Islamic times, perhaps with the concurrence of some Zoroastrian circles that accepted a pessimistic apocalyptic approach to the future, and explained their own past according to the same perspective. But this was a kind of retrospective; the invention of (false) tradition was in order to justify the present conditions.

As we noted before, according to Mas‘ūdī,²³⁴ the time between Zoroaster and Alexander would have been about 300 years²³⁵ (258 according to the version given

234 Carra de Vaux 1896: 140.

235 The relation between the two chronological figures, specifically 300 and 258, is an object of never-ending polemical discussions. Some scholars have tried to explain 258 as 300 – 42, the year of Zoroaster when he converted Wištāsp; other radically deny this evidence. I believe that the origin of the figure 300 is old and follows the triadic pattern attested within the cycle of Yima/Jim (as suggested by Gershevitch 1995: 13, and Gnoli 2000: 153-158, *passim*), whose expan-

in the *Golden Meadows*), while between Alexander and Ardašīr there were about another 510 years, so that the new Sasanian king, knowing the prophecy, should have recognized that there were only 200 years before the occurrence of the end of the millennium. After our previous observations, we can reasonably presume that the tradition according to which Ardašīr would have decided to postpone this deadline by cutting 250 of the already 500 past years, which already occurred between Alexander and his own ascent to the throne, was based on a simple overlapping of different genealogical and dynastic eras with a scarce interest in the historical reality, but with the aim of founding the perspective of the millennium of Zoroaster. It was a religious fabrication with the support of Persian astrologers and chronologists having access to other models, such as the *Chronicle of Nabonassar*,²³⁶ but without any interest in the international divulgation of this scheme. In few words, the Mazdean chronology was a theological and political operation, not an official system of computation. When dating conversions with other systems were necessary for practical reasons, the Persians knew everything, and no secret was incumbent on the Persian chronologists or excluded them from true synchronisms. Furthermore, the cutting of the historical sequences of time, which corresponds, as we have seen, not only to a dimidiation of the Parthian era, but also to the elimination of the Seleucid dynasty, and the temporal transfer of Zoroaster and the Kayāniāns/

sive action takes three times, during which he enlarges the world of $1/3$, $2/3$, $3/3$ (than the original dimension, i.e. $9/3$), and this happens after 300 years, 600 years and 900, i.e. every time after a time span of 300 years (Panaino 2004b; 2012; 2013). But this striking fact does not exclude *a priori* that already in Sasanian times the two figures might be put in connection for further speculations.

236 Cf. already Shahbazi 2002: 22.

Achaemenians to the beginnings of the Seleucid era, does not reflect a desire to publish an official, international, presentation of an Iranian chronology. In that case, it would have occurred in official documents. On the contrary, this was a pseudo-historical reformulation of a sort of Mazdean philosophy of history, whose rationale was the millennial hope for the future, not a fear about it. In this respect, the dynasties, which were cut off and obliterated, were considered unworthy of calculation within an Iranian perspective. We must presume that the idea of past history, when projected before Zoroaster, entered a dimension of very high approximation, belonging to myth, not to proper history, as we can imagine. The objective disentanglement of which we have spoken at length, explains this (for us) extremely peculiar attitude that created a new division of time. The Persians were likely not shocked by the contemporary use and inner circulation of different systems of chronological computation. Any system followed its own rationale and proper logic, connected with its background, culture, language, religion, etc. For this reason, in later times different chronologies coexisted without particular obstacles. Our idea that any system should be coherent, allowing for a logical synchronism with the other ones within a common superstructure of reasonable compatibilities and official criteria of conversion, was not current, and it would have been considered meaningless when the religious dimension was involved. The evident presence of a-synchronic or diverging patterns did not scandalize anybody, because what was important is that the Mazdean calendar of the Sasanian times offered a temporal line easily convertible within other contemporary systems. Nobody was calculating taxes or international truces after the date of Zoroaster. The age of the prophet and its beginning was not an international matter of debate, so that its anchoring was considered

to be an internal Persian problem. Thus, despite the fact that this event was the turning point of worldwide history for a Mazdean, no Persian priest would have been particularly interested in establishing a multicultural and universal chronology, which could be fittingly harmonized with other traditions, such as the ones belonging to the Greeks, the Egyptians or the Romans as well. Multiculturalism was not the rule, but the extreme exception, and idiosyncratic and nationalistic solutions were probably much more common. This evidence did not exclude some astonishing facts confirming the intelligence of the ancients. In the epoch of Husraw I and Justinian, in the course of the redaction of the treaty concerning the end of the Lazica war,²³⁷ the issue of a fitting calendrical synchronism between calendars became crucial, and the two parties agreed on the bilateral use of the vague Egyptian solar year in order to avoid mutual misunderstandings or mistakes, which could offer a good reason for a new war. But this was a crude political problem, concerning payments, exchanges of delegations, inspections of the borders, etc., not the determination of a foundational remote date for a religious chronology. Ancient means “ancient”, not “stupid”!

13. The Arrow of Time and its Theological Relevance in the Mazdean Philosophy of Time

Now, we can turn again for a while to the Arabic sources and their contents. Despite the fact that very many elements contained in Mas‘ūdī’s narration are preposterous and unbelievable, the whole composition of the arguments underpinning the creation of this false chronology are enormously important for our compre-

237 Panaino 2009b.

hension of some ideas circulating in the early Islamic period. For this reason, it is my intention to focus on some aspects of the debate in order to uncover a number of important points that are, in my opinion, not well clarified. About this subject, I must recall that among the first scholars to reject the absolute historicity of this tradition we find Henning,²³⁸ who sharply wrote (in the framework of a bold attack against Nyberg) the following:²³⁹

We need not go into the details of his ingenious construction; for there is no evidence of any description to show that the Persians of the time of Yazdegerd were worried by millennial speculations; but, what is more important, it has been proved in the meantime that the traditional date must have been known as early as the beginning of the Sassanian reign, in the third century.

Henning's statement sounds very authoritative, as frequently was the case in his contributions, but, despite its relevance, even his remark is, at least in part, too generic. The millennialism was a significant character of ancient Mazdeism, and the speculations about time and the end of the mixed creation were very relevant, although this does not mean that the Zoroastrians had reasons to be worried about the imminent end of the limited time, as the German scholar rightly observed. This subject is really intriguing, but nowadays we can and must face it in a different way. After a critical examination of the source in itself, an issue that we have already addressed above, the problem presents at least other two sides: the first one concerns the methodological approach with which most of Western scholarship has treated this tradition. In my opinion, beyond the reception of this statement, great was (and still is) the suggestion produced by an inappropriate and ille-

238 See Henning 1951: 37.

239 Nyberg 1938: 31 -35, 43-47; 1966: XII-XV; 1968: 46-47.

gitimate (implicit or even unconscious) comparison (and association) with the Western popular reaction to the turn of the first millennium CE. Unfortunately, the theological and social premises underpinning the sentiments of fear current in the framework of Christian Europe²⁴⁰ cannot be uncritically associated or assimilated to a (presumed) corresponding situation expected to have equally taken place similarly within the Iranian (Mazdean) world. On the contrary, all the discussions concerning this Mazdean secret (even those proposed by the scholars who rejected it), do not touch upon this particular aspect, avoiding any pertinent discussion about the main points of the Zoroastrian “theology of time”,²⁴¹ or more simply, the representation of time as developed in the later Iranian theology. The presumptive existence of such a fear has been thus assumed as a true fact *a priori*, so sound to be unworthy of any additional supporting argument, and this approach has been *per se* very peculiar, because it is ungrounded, as we have already noted, and we will soon show better again. I owe to my late and regretted mentor and master, Prof. Gherardo Gnoli, the merit of having called my attention to this striking evidence. This chance was possible, when I was given the privilege to contribute to the posthumous edition of an unpublished article left by him, and to which I was asked to write a short introductory preface.²⁴² There,

240 See Frugoni 2020: 11-98, 343-355 with bibliography. The end of the millennium was sometimes connected with the manifestation of the Leviathan and the Antichrist, a fear that in later times was strictly associated with the cycles of Saturn and Jupiter conjunctions. On this subject, see the superb monographic study offered by Heilen 2020.

241 See the up-to-date discussion in Panaino 2020a; cf. also Panaino 2021b.

242 See Gnoli in the press. I must thank again for his kindness Prof. Adriano V. Rossi, who gave me this opportunity. This article will appear in the new edition of the periodical *East and West*, in its original Italian version accompanied by an English translation.

I noticed the relevance of the above quoted consideration left by Henning, despite the fact that I had read it many times without (even by me) any additional reflection on its deeper meaning. But this time I considered it through a different perspective. As I hope to have shown in the present study, its discussion results in something crucial for our correct comprehension of the Iranian perception of historical time within the Mazdean framework, and this will demonstrate that no millennial fear was strictly compatible with the Zoroastrian theology.

Why was Henning's observation so important despite any other consideration concerning the tantalizing subject of the date of Zoroaster, on which I myself do not follow in terms of its historicity? If we try to find a doctrinal basis of any kind for Mazdean millennial fear, we are put in a total predicament, because a doctrine like that was absolutely unknown in the earlier religious sources. For this reason, it would be better to clarify our arguments showing that its supposed existence is groundless and at odds with the Mazdean doctrine of time, while the real innovation regarded the chronological alignment between the millennium of Zoroaster and the Seleucid era. Zoroastrianism, actually, developed already in the Young Avestan period, a proper millennial scheme,²⁴³ whose existence is confirmed by Plutarch's account about the Persian religion,²⁴⁴ within the framework of a text whose *Vorlage* could even go back to Theopompus (4th c. BCE), as we can reasonably suppose.²⁴⁵ From the Avestan texts and their later reception, we simply deduce that the Mazdean chiliasm was basically optimistic and that no future catastrophic event was expected.²⁴⁶ In

243 Kellens 2000; 2009; Panaino 2016.

244 See de Jong 1997: 165-204.

245 See again de Jong 1997: 162, 200.

246 In my opinion, the Greek reference to the figure 6,000 regarding the years between Zoroaster and some events in Western history, con-

the past, the millennium of Yima²⁴⁷ faced in the final part a tremendous winter and Yima himself entered into a *vara*, i.e. a place especially protected, but the turn of his millennium, and even his death, did not prevent a further positive development.²⁴⁸ The birth of Zoroaster offered new hopes for a most optimistic conclusion of the 9th millennium, so that we cannot deduce that the end of a chiliadic period was compellingly marked by a catastrophe. More precisely, we can observe patent dialectics between positive and negative forces and trends, but no exclusive sequence of dramas marking the end of any millennial phase. If there is a defeat, there is also a stronger answer against it. This is also the logic of the ping-pong sequence between the creative actions carried out by Ohrmazd, and the antagonist enactments performed by Ahreman according to the first chapter of the *Widēwdād*.²⁴⁹

For this reason, we can exclude the existence of any notion about an ancestral pessimistic doctrine concerning the cyclical end of each chiliadic period. The space-time framework of the *gētīg* was conceived as a trap within which Ahreman should be completely defeated, so that the end of the limited time must inevitably mark the absolute victory of Ohrmazd. The witness of victory will

cerns not the true date of Zoroaster, but that of the creation of his *frauuāšī*, as already shown by Jackson (1899: 152-154). The articles regarding this specific matter are very numerous. We can quote just some of them, which contain a large bibliography, such as Humbach 1984; 1991, I; Gnoli 2000, or Kingsley 1990; Gershevitch 1995; Shahbazi 2002; Kellens 2001.

247 Panaino 2004b, *passim*; 2012; 2017b. It is to be noted that the Avestan millennium of Yima is based on three periods of three hundred years each, closed by the last century in which Yima brought part of humanity into the *vara*-, and at the end was killed. See again the discussion about the winter in Panaino 2013, *passim*. Cf. Herzfeld 1947, I: 4-5.

248 See Panaino 2013.

249 See Christensen 1943.

be eventually confirmed at the turn of each of the three final millennia of the whole Zoroastrian cosmic year (of 12,000 years),²⁵⁰ when the approaching conclusion of every millennium would be announced by the miraculous birth of one the three posthumous sons of Zoroaster. As we recalled, each one of them will be delivered by a virgin, exactly 30 years²⁵¹ before the fatal stroke determined by the turn of thousand solar years.²⁵²

As I have remarked in another study with many additional details,²⁵³ and summarized before in that article, the desperate attempts to block or at least to slow down the ascending course of the sun, and, then with it, time itself, carried out by a heavenly Druj (as it was thus mentioned in the third book of the *Dēnkard*), are explicitly marked as demonic events, and the explanation for this doctrine was very simple. The arrow of time confirms step by step, day by day, hour by hour, the ineluctability of the final annihilation of Ahreman, and any act of decelerating the regular progress of limited time would be an Ahremanic attempt, because it would prolong his dreadful presence within the mixed world. Thus, Ahreman and his creatures are intrinsically enemies of the regular course of time. In a doctrinal framework such as this one, any particular fear for the arrival of the turn of the millennium (and thus the final Sōšāns and his previous²⁵⁴ brothers) would be in principle incompatible (even) with the Late Antiquity Zoroastrian conception of time. The act of conscious “evaporation” of more than two centuries (which should have been re-

250 See Panaino 2016.

251 In reality, the third one, i.e. the Sōšāns *par excellence*, at least according to some traditions, will appear 47 years before the end of the millennium and of the world. See the pertinent discussion in Panaino 2018.

252 Panaino 2018.

253 See Panaino 2018.

254 Cf. here the note n. 264.

peated again) would be nonsensical in a system like this, as a sort of gift to Ahreman. Thus, why would the first Sasanians, in particular Ardašīr I, have feared the manifestation of the first posthumous son of Zoroaster? Why should the new triumphant royal family have desired to introduce a strong delay against the approaching end of the battle against Ahreman, trying to do their best to postpone the supposed date of the first (posthumous) son of Zoroaster? Did they really suppose that such a peculiar secret would have been ignored even by Ohrmazd, who would have supposedly agreed to delay the manifestation of Zoroaster's sons according to the will of his earthly kings and priests? Were they so much in trouble to keep the secret of the true chronology, in order to be ready to expect the Sōšāns in a proper way, but without any involvement of the Iranian peoples? But why this? Furthermore, again, why would this fear have become so strong at the beginning of the new dynasty, when the Sasanian leaders were expanding their power with no limit apparently in front of them? Furthermore, the potential positive association of the king with a future Sōšāns should have enforced their self-confidence. Why this fear? The only hypothetical solution would be that of assuming that the Mazdean doctrine of the limited time was later established, but there is no ground underpinning such a weak explanation, and finding its rationale will present us with many difficulties and logical inconsistencies. In fact, we can debate about the astronomical background behind the origin of the ascent of the sun to the highest point, but the basic rationale of the Ahremanic action against the normal running of the limited time is logic, simple, and old.



ANTONIO PANAINO

14. Chronology, Millennialism and Political Expectations. A Critical Scenario

All the warnings we presented seem to reflect a different scenario, embedded in a most depressive atmosphere of defeat, humiliation, and turmoil, so to speak, such as the one started during the last years of the Sasanian Empire and continuing in the course of the following centuries, when its collapse was progressively felt as an irreversible event. On the other hand, even these dramatic moments would not justify such a fear about the turn of the millennium, because the expectation of the posthumous son of the Mazdean prophet was certainly desired and it could be eventually considered as the starting point for a resurrection/insurrection of the Iranian identity. In a framework like that, any cosmic disaster of divine origin would have (or could have) been interpreted as a good event from the (desperate) perspective of an Iranian (Mazdean) insurgency, and we know that some attempts at resistance and rebellion took place in reality.²⁵⁵ For this reason, if some Zoroastrians accepted the notion that the millennium of Zoroaster should endure some years more, we can suspect that their expectation was related to the manifestation of Ošēdar,²⁵⁶ not

255 See the still remarkable study by Sadighi 1938; important consideration in Crone 2012.

256 The supposition that the absence of any manifestation of the expected posthumous son of Zoroaster would have been a shock is just hypothetical, and we cannot speculate too much about it. Theoretically, various options were at hand, such as the claim that he had appeared, but that he had remained “hidden”, or that he had appeared, but just remained noticed only by a few, etc. Certainly, when chapter XXXVI,10 of the *Bundahišn* openly states that for the present scribe, probably Farrōbag, son of Ašawahišt (*Bundahišn*, XXXVA,8; Agostini – Thrope 2020: 189), it was the year 527 of the Pārsīg era, a date that places this redaction around the year 1098 CE, it is clear that



to another defeat. But the idea that an earlier Sasanian clergy could assume that the destiny, fixed within celestial time, could be magically changed by cutting half of a past historical chronology is highly improbable. The fabrication of the arguments for this faulty Parthian/

he knew well that from the beginning of the millennium of Zoroaster more than a millennium had already passed. Nevertheless, this priest did not feel any compelling obligation to explain or justify the absence of any apparent manifestation of Ošēdar. This side of the millennial problem seems to have been simply ignored or avoided. On the contrary, as well emphasized by Grenet (2015: 112-113), in the *Zand ī Wahman Yasn* IX,1 (Cereti 1995a: 126, 145, 166) the end of the millennium of Zoroaster and the arrival of Ošēdar is moved into the future, and placed in the year 1600 (*pad ēk hazār ud šaš-sad sāl*), according to the manuscript K20 (i.e. in the second half of the XIV century), or in the year 1800 (*pad ēk hazār ud hašt sad sāl*), according to the codex DH, which was transcribed two centuries later. Cereti (1995a: 218), who carefully discusses the problem, rightly suspects that the difference was more probably due to the fact that the scribe of DH added two hundred years, because the posthumous son of the prophet was not yet born. The possibility that this difference might be due to the presence of two originally different chronologies is considered less probable. Certainly, the figures attested in the mss tradition put us in a very challenging situation, because even the addition of two centuries becomes a bizarre and preposterous attempt at saving what cannot be saved. This radical conclusion emerges when we consider that the “Savior” should come with, at least, a delay of 600 years, so that the figure of 1,800 years cannot impress the reader’s sensibility, especially if we think that these numbers have a strict meaning within a millennial scheme that, at the same time, they are completely disentangling. I must also call attention to another interesting fact. In the tradition of the *Ayādgār ī Jāmāspīg* XV,54 (Agostini 2013: 114, 160), the first of the posthumous sons of Zoroaster, Ošēdar is placed after a series of events which occurred after the Islamic invasion. This chronology was obviously incompatible with that established in the millennium of Zoroaster, but it is clear that the composer of this later source tried to ignore the fact, instead of admitting that the expected liberator had not manifested or arrived, but nobody saw him.

Persian chronology as due to fear can be ascribed only to the Islamic period, and probably they do not belong to a truly Mazdean context, or exclusively to it, although their diffusion might have been extended to involve also some members of the Mazdean community for various political reasons, as suggested above. Certainly, we must consider that the emergence of a new prophet bringing a cosmic and political tempest would have been a positive event from the Zoroastrian point of view. In other words, the Mazdeans in those dramatic circumstances had nothing to lose with the turn of the millennium. For this reason, it is very peculiar (and substantially groundless) the inference according to which the introduction of a delay of more than two centuries within the Parthian era (by cutting its normal length in order to enlarge the time span before the expected conclusion of the millennium) was considered natural. This solution would be even more peculiar within a simple millennial scheme, which patently clashed with any careful evaluation of the intellectual Mazdean background. I would simply like to note that the basic arguments underpinning the frequent assumption about the plausibility of such a secret should be supported at least by textual references and doctrinal traditions. Instead of this, we have only a number of *a priori* presumptions and rumors. But the fear for the end of the millennium was not at all an original Zoroastrian obsession. It is more probable that this fear had originated outside, presumably in a cultural milieu that started to accept and develop a number of apocalyptic models, which entered into even the Zoroastrian community with special regard for the interpretation of the fourth millennium of the *gētīg*. We must observe that in itself apocalypticism with its specific dark atmosphere had nothing to do with primordial Zoroastrianism, whose expectations were victorious and heroic. After the collapse of the Achaemenian Empire and the emergence of the Seleucid

domination, as Kosmin has fittingly shown,²⁵⁷ the Iranian area was deeply exposed to a number of foreign narrations, which supported the dissemination of dramatic apocalyptic images. These “nightmares” entered into the cultural atmosphere of some Mazdean environments, in particular those more exposed to the Jewish and, later, Christian influences, so that a number of external doctrines modified certain important characteristics of the Mazdean theological tradition. In turn, some Mazdean ideas concerning the power and role of time exercised influence on the Jewish-Christian chiliasm.²⁵⁸

Thus, on the one hand, we find the diffusion of apocalypticism, and, on the other hand, we recognize the presence of much more optimistic apokatastatic doctrines, which would be standardized in the theological tradition of the 9th century. I am hesitant to attribute the origin of this fear about the end of the millennium *only* to an alleged impact of some earlier astrological doctrines, such as, in particular, those concerning historical horoscopy and the cycles of Saturn-Jupiter conjunctions, a doctrine which in some aspects overlapped with the Mazdean doctrine of the millennia.²⁵⁹ In reality, these doctrines cannot be *per se* reduced to a natural or intrinsic pessimism, which is different from fatalism (which is intrinsically *anceps*), despite the fact that a Great Conjunction (in particular the one marking a complete turn of four conjunctions of 248 [or sometimes 258] years each)²⁶⁰ can announce radi-

257 See Kosmin 2018, *passim*; cf. also Panaino 2021.

258 Panaino 2018.

259 See Kennedy and Pingree (1971) with reference to the astrological history of Māšā’llāh.

260 We must recall that a Greek Byzantine author, Agathias (II,26,1), with direct reference to the Persians of his times, noted that the date of Zoroaster was unclear, and that the Persians usually made reference to a certain Hystaspes, although his definitive identification was not sharply fixed, in particular whether this man was the father

cal political or religious changes. The historical meaning and impact of this phenomenon might be explained in different terms and according to contrastive opinions.²⁶¹ What is certain is that even if we would attribute at least part of this fear to an astrological secret, warning the future destiny of the Sasanian family, we should postulate the earlier constitution of a pessimistic apotelesmatic doctrine already in the Parthian period, but such a precise solution would be simply the fruit of a guess without any explicit support. On the contrary, we well know that a very successful horoscope concerning the future triumph of a young prince, namely Ardašir I, circulated.²⁶² The insurgence of the new Sasanian dynasty should have supported a strong revival of the *ērīh* (“ancestral Iranian nobility”),²⁶³ and with it also Mazdean pride. Thus, the Sasanian leadership had no special reasons to face its historical and political destiny, even in cosmological terms, under the dark shadow of a pessimistic millennial fear about the potential arrival of Ošēdar, the first one (but, in reality, the youngest one among Zoroaster’s posthumous

of Darius I or someone else. About two other Hystaspes, associated with the father of Darius, see already Jackson 1889: 159-160. On the other hand, Ammianus Marcellinus (23,6,32) considered Hystaspes as the father of Darius (*Hystaspes rex prudentissimus, Darii pater*); cf. Jackson 1899: 167-168.

261 In Islamic times, even the revelation of Muḥammad and its impact on future history was embedded into the astrological chronology based on the cycles of the planetary conjunctions. The success of this Sasanian doctrine exercised an enormous influence, and a certain historical fatalism should have met with a meaningful success even in the explanation of Zoroastrian history and its historical (temporary) failure.

262 See Panaino 2004b; 2020c.

263 See in particular Gnoli 1989. The subject has been the object of a careful study by Terribili 2010, in which the different meanings of the term *ērīh* have been treated in detail.

sons),²⁶⁴ who would make himself manifest in history.

The intriguing suggestion proposed by Shahbazi²⁶⁵ (but rejected by Gnoli with some opposite arguments),²⁶⁶ that Mazdak himself would have claimed to be himself the Sōšāns would have been theoretically a plausible pretention, apart from the fact that no source directly confers this information. In any case, it cannot be used to justify any millennial fear. On the contrary, it would have confirmed the fact that the Sasanians knew that the millennium of Zoroaster was already close to its end around the 5th or the 6th century (according to the date chosen for his origin, which could have been different according to the various Mazdean communities or the chronologies adopted). For the same reason, also the idea that it could have been Husraw I himself who cut the fourth Iranian millennium under compelling pressure, again due to a millennial fear, does not find any documented reason, because he would have reduced the length of a millennium already finished or close to its end (again according to the date accepted for the prophet). This operation would have been much more difficult, because it involved a radical change in a well-established religious chronology. This innovation would have provoked many oppositions and rumors, of which we have no witness. If the millennial expectation would be a reason for fear, it would have troubled Sasanian history on many other occasions, while this argument was never adopted, and, as stated before, it was in

264 When Zoroaster joined his wife, he had three intercourses with her, and at the end of each one he emitted semen into the waters. As we have noted before, the order of the births of the three following posthumous sons is reversed with respect to the emission of Zoroaster's sperm, so that the oldest son, the final savior, is the one conceived from the semen emitted during the first intercourse of Zoroaster with his youngest wife.

265 Shahbazi 2002.

266 Gnoli in the press.

open contrast with what we know of the Mazdean sense of human history and time. It was the sudden collapse of the Sasanian Empire that dramatically re-opened the door of an apocalyptic cosmic pessimism, and favored the progressive disseminations of rumors concerning a cynical cut of the span of time within the dynastic chronology, deliberately designed by Ardašīr I (or by Husraw I) in periods in which, if not everything, certainly very many situations were evolving in an appreciably positive way. But was this really a Persian doctrine, or was the attribution of such a fear to the Persians a foreign idea? This is a matter on which we should direct further investigations, in particular if we suspect, as here suggested, that the invention of the fake was a later attempt, which probably answered certain political needs.²⁶⁷

For all these reasons, we do not deny that authors such as Masʿūdī could have collected from a contemporary or earlier environment their pieces of information about an alleged secret concerning the deliberate creation of a “faulty Persian chronology” and that this decision would have been ascribed already to Ardašīr’s desire to postpone the end of the millennium (although this is *in se* implausible), but we know that the attribution of this fear to the earlier Sasanians sounds most suspicious and peculiar. Very remarkably, Masʿūdī himself forgets this explanation on other occasions. The long and well-argued discussion developed by Lewy,²⁶⁸ who noted that practically the Persians would have cut the length of the whole Seleucid era, calculating the beginning of the true Parthian period only from the moment in which the

267 Perhaps, a similar situation happened at the end of the first millennium in the Western world, when some dynasties tried to reform, and falsified earlier documents for political reasons; on this subject, see Roach 2021.

268 Lewy 1944, *passim*.

Arsacids (or the Ascanians) were considered as properly worthy of the title of “king of kings”, starting with one event, which could be particularly relevant in world history is very interesting, but focuses only on one side of the problem. As we have seen, it is not only the length of the Parthian era that requires explanations, but also the bold synchronism between Zoroaster and the beginning of the Seleucid era. The (new) Parthian starting point would have been actually connected with the victory of Sūrēn (under king Orodes II) against Crassus (54 BCE = 258 SE) and related to another one, taking place 14 years later, i.e. Pacorus’ entry in Jerusalem (40 BCE = 272 SE). According to this reconstruction, one internal tradition diffused among early Persian chronologists would have simply considered (against the past tradition) the beginning of the Parthian era²⁶⁹ from that moment. This solution could be accepted or not, but in any case, it does not justify the earlier shift of the era of Zoroaster (and the Achaemenians) of more than two centuries later. Finally, I will try to suggest an interpretative proposal.

15. The Problem and its Dark Side

If we turn the matter and assume that Mazdean thinkers (who reshaped the chronology of the era of Zoroaster and established a synchronism with the Seleucid era or with the era of the astrologers) did not intend to cut

269 For the determination of the Parthian era, beginning with the year 247 BCE, exactly on the vernal equinox, corresponding in Babylon to 1 Nisan = 14 April, see already Smith 1875: 389; Ginzel 1906, I, 136-138; Debevoise 1938: 9, n. 38; Wolski 1993: 59, n. 3. Cf. also the anonymous article “Arsacid era” in the *Encyclopædia Iranica*, II. We must recall that Smith made a little mistake fixing the beginning of this era one year earlier, i.e. in 248 BCE, while it started in the year 247.

anything, but just moved forward, toward a relative future with respect to the real history of the age of their prophet, the whole millennial scheme would assume a different value. They were not escaping from the violence of past times, cutting pieces of time for fear of the future; on the contrary, they moved onwards the mythic and semi-historical times into a version of a (pseudo)-real history; from a very remote past to a more perceivable past. Thus, Zoroaster came out of a remote antiquity and became a chronological pivot in a historical dimension, a pivot well positioned at the starting point of the most important chronological era of Late Antiquity Persian times. If we consider that the Persians did not imagine future time as in front of them, but as behind, as well shown by Rezania,²⁷⁰ the meaningful past in front of them was that of Zoroaster, whose era embedded and encapsulated that of the other dynasties. Thus, the visible time (i.e. the past) was there, fully blocked, while the future was chasing them. So we can say that they were running toward victory and the expectation of Zoroaster's sons with these hopes of future glory on their back. This was a choice, based on a theological and teleological vision, in which the role of time had a finalist force and target. The past was moved forward into a relative (past) future, and it became foundational for a historical truth. Of course, this was not true from the objective point of general history, but it was so for the internal Iranian and Mazdean perspective, and this was *per se* sufficient. We have no reason to assume that this kind of chronological reduction was really due to a millennial fear, as Mas'ūdī stated on one occasion. On the contrary, I believe that there was a more

270 See the detailed discussion by Rezania 2019. For the Mesopotamian world, cf. Archi 1998; Livingstone 1999; Wasserman 2005: 28-29, *passim*; 2019; for a psychological approach, see de la Fuente et alii 2014.

plausible and inner motivation behind this mistaken simplification of historical past chronology. Probably, the Sasanians (at least a few of them) had direct knowledge of real world-history, because they had access to western sources and step by step to astronomical and calendrical comparative details with which they could compare. A simplistic solution that would propose ignorance is therefore insufficient.

My idea is that the situation was at the same time simpler and more complex. It was simpler, because that change was arranged before or just at the beginning of the Sasanian kingdom, and it was based on a foundational expectation of *long durée*, on both sides, the past and the future. On the other hand, it is probable that the Sasanians, despite their practical knowledge of the era of the Babylonian astrologers, i.e. the Seleucid era (and obviously also the Parthian one), did not like to make references to past dynasties, the Seleucids and the Parthians in particular, and used their chronologies the least amount possible. The dynasts, antecedent with respect to the Persian ascent to power, were considered unworthy of such a detailed memory. Equally, the Persians refused to adopt a true era for their own dynasty, as it was done in the case of the Seleucids or the Parthians, and counted the regnal year of each king's reign, but without referring to a whole uninterrupted dynastic chronology. All the reasons behind this political choice are not clear, and I admit that the subject must be studied in further detail, but certainly it does not mean that the Sasanians had no access to comparative synchronisms. Surely, this kind of knowledge was preserved within the framework of the high bureaucratic administration, the circles of the astrologers, and among all the people who had access to international relations and sources for the sake of the royal

family and the empire.²⁷¹ When the requirement of historical and chronological prevision was less important, the reconstruction of the past entered a process of (national) revision, based not only on the *realia*, but also on the attempt at *justifying* past and present history. After the collapse of the Sasanian Empire it was possible to establish a correspondence with the fall of the Achaemenians, and propose a pseudo-historical explanation based on a (pseudo)-millennial prophecy. In this way, the redetermination of their chronology was not properly historical, but foundational for the vindication of a wounded and defeated identity and so assumed inevitably an ideological and partisan scope: to justify the present and prepare revenge in the future. For this reason, the simplification of the previous dynastical phases, via a limited rehabilitation of the Parthian regime from an internal point of view with respect to the Zoroastrian religious history, offered a vaporization of the Seleucid followers of Alexander. Who in that time would have questioned (or even remembered) the exact length of the Parthian dynasty and era? With the exception of the most prominent and ancient Iranian noble clans,²⁷² only the Armenians might recall better that past, but their peripheral role and the progressive Christianization should have reduced the weight of their historiography, at least in Persia. The Arsacids in any case were worth being mentioned, as it happens in the *Dēnkard* IV [Ms B 321,3-8], because they were inevitably part of the sacred legacy of the Avestan textual recovery, which attributed an attempt at collecting some scattered fragments of the Mazdean revelation to the Parthian king Walagaš (M.P. Walakš, N.P. Balāš, i.e. one of the five

271 Very fittingly, Terribili (personal communication), suggests to me the denomination of “historiosophy” for the creation of this new elaboration of an inner historiography for inner recipients.

272 See Pourshariati 2008.

Arsacid kings named Vologeses),²⁷³ but nothing more. An additional difficult problem would concern the definitive identification of this Walagaš among the five potentially fitting Arsacid candidates. One possibility would be identifying this *šāhān šāh* with the one very active from the year 54 CE, who played a certain international role, but we have also the possibility to associate the Parthian promoter of the Avestan recovery with another king named Walagaš (147-191), who restored a strong unity within the Parthian kingdom, despite some defeats. Another candidate could be his son, who was enthroned around the year 191 and reigned until the year 209 CE. Their involvement in the ancestral folklore of the Aryans was known but considered politically dangerous and subversive.²⁷⁴ The mark of the demonic invasion into the Iranian framework (and the anachronistic destruction of the written version of the *Avesta*) was connected to the arrival of Alexander, and the beginning of his kingdom. In this respect, the determination of a period of 258 years (if we do not assume *a priori* that this was an historical date)²⁷⁵ should be due

273 Humbach 1991, I: 52-53; Gnoli 2000: 150-151. Perhaps the first solution is more probable, because his action would be closer to the new dynastic phase attributed to the Parthians within the religious history of the millennium, but also the third king named Vologeses (147-191) had a very important role in the restoration of a certain unity and central control within the Parthian reign. On the name and the Parthian kings with this denomination, see Justi 1895: 344-346.

274 Panaino 2019.

275 I would like to observe that the historical value of the traditional date of Zoroaster has never been imposed as a dogma within the Zoroastrian community, and this despite the prestigious attestation in important Zoroastrian Pahlavi texts. If one asks a contemporary Zoroastrian priest about his opinion on the age of Zoroaster, it is possible to hear different opinions, but I have never found a reference to the 258 years before Alexander. It is probable that for the Mazdean clergy, after the collapse of the Sasanian empire and the loss of an active political role, the historical implications connected with the

to the fixation of some temporal landmarks, such as, for instance, the death of Darius III (330 BCE), and the new domination of Alexander, while the lordship of Wištāsp, associated with Zoroaster and the *dēn*, was connected with the beginning of the fourth millennium, that of Capricorn.²⁷⁶ But this chronology was not the only one,

millennial model of the era of Zoroaster lost some importance, and thus they stopped having any serious influence.

276 The 30 years of Zoroaster and his posthumous sons assume a central role in the numerological and astral speculations of the Zoroastrians. A patent reflection of this trend is visible, as also Terribili remarks to me, in the horoscope of Gayōmart (where Jupiter and Saturn are in their exaltations; *Bundahišn* VI,3-5 (Agostini – Thrope 2020: 49); *Wizīdagīhā ī Zādspram* II,21-22 (Gignoux – Tafazzoli 1993: 38-39); cf. also Raffaelli 2001; 2017: 178-179, and n.60), the prototype of the future humanity, who can survive for 30 years within the *gumēzišn* and who shares a number of analogical functions with Zoroaster himself. This correspondence is particularly fitting, especially when we consider that the horoscope of the world and that of the first man follow the pattern of the Indian *thema natale* of the *Mahāpuruṣa*. The Islamic astrologers too offered various computations for the birth of Muḥammad and the dissemination of Islam within the scheme of the astrological conjunctions of Jupiter and Saturn (see Labarta 1982) in connection with the shift or transit of the single “triplicities” (Panaino 2015: 252). I and Terribili assume that this common representation of the religious history played a remarkable role in the elaboration of the patterns through which the ideal image of the *Religionsstifter* was shaped between Late Antiquity and early Middle Ages. In the post-Sasanian framework, we can follow the astrological historiography developed by Māšā’allāh (Panaino 2015: 252; 2019). According to a similar pattern, the shift into the astrological zodiacal trigone of fire was considered as a sign of ascent for the Abbasids (see al-Bīrūnī’s *Chronology*; Sachau 1878: 213; Sachau 1879: 197). Al-Bīrūnī affirms that some local Iranian dynasties would have adopted this sign as their emblem. From these facts, we can deduce that, at least within the Abbasid framework, historical astrology played a direct influence on the shape of a chronology that might account for prophetic manifestations and dynastic successions. Coming back to the

even in the Mazdean framework, and the example of the *Chronicle of Nabonassar* confirms the existence of other temporal dynastical blocks, whose arrangement could be manipulated and/or reinterpreted. All these chronological references suffered some oscillations.²⁷⁷ For instance, in the *Bundahišn*, the last chapter (§ XXXVI) never men-

role of Gayōmart, who can be put into a coherent line of succession to Zoroaster and his posthumous sons, we can observe a redetermination of their acme in connection with their 30th year of age, which in any case becomes foundational in their lives. Even in the case of Gayōmart, his death gives impulse to the dissemination of human life, so that his 30th year is the one that transforms a defeat into a victory.

277 If we assume that the beginning of the 258 years was equated with the conversion of Wištāsp, we will find again the figure of the 300 years from Alexander. By intertwining the data of the *Bundahišn* (XXXIII,15-16 [Agostini – Thrope 2020: 173]) and that of Mas’ūdi, one would obtain a good point confirming this interpretation. The *Bundahišn* actually places the end of the millennium in the 30th year of Wištāsp’s reign. In Mas’ūdi (Carra de Vaux 1896: 130), Zoroaster manifests himself to Wištāsp during his 31st year of reign. The text of the *Bundahišn* (XXXVI,7-9 [Agostini – Thrope 2020: 192-193]) offers again another supportive piece of information: before the end of the millennium, Wištāsp reigns “for thirty years until the coming of the *dēn*”, an expression that leaves room for various interpretative solutions, as Terribili observes (personal communication). Actually, within the following paragraph, the 10th millennium is inaugurated by Zoroaster’s success at the court of Wištāsp. If the first reference was associated with the last *hampursagih* (*Dēnkard* VII,4,1 and 4,65 [Molé 1967: 42-43, 54-55; Rashed-Mossael 2010: 53, 66-67]), when Zoroaster acquires the *dēn* completely (*Wizīdagihā ī Zādspram* XXIV,4 [Gignoux – Tafazzoli 1993: 84-85]; *Dēnkard* V,2,8 [Amouzgar – Tafazzoli 2000: 28-29]; *Pahlavi Rewāyat to the Dādestān ī Dēnīg* XLVII,1-5 [Williams 1990, I: 168-169; II: 76]), we find a very fitting contiguity of the events. Finally, *Bundahišn* XXXVI,9 is explicit in starting the calculation from the conversion of Wištāsp and his subsequent 90 years of reign (258 up to Alexander), a fact indicating that in this text “the coming of the *dēn*”, which marks the end of the millennium, does not refer to the beginning of the revelation, but to its complete manifestation on earth (40 years of Zarathustra).

tions explicitly the figure 258 for the years of Zoroaster's time (although this figure can be easily inferred), despite the fact that Humbach²⁷⁸ assumed that al-Bīrūnī would have deduced such a number from there, but puts 274 years between the beginning of the fourth millennium and Alexander,²⁷⁹ who in any case reigns for 14 years. The Arsacid kingdom was attributed 284 years in the same chapter of the *Bundahišn*,²⁸⁰ while the *Ayādgar ī Jāmāspīg* § XV,6²⁸¹ gave them 282 years, a figure which is closer to that of the *Bundahišn*, but remarkably different from that of the 266 years that we should expect. Probably, we have to admit that after the fall of the Sasanian kingdom, even more different chronologies circulated,²⁸² and that, as al-Bīrūnī remarked, the Parthian era (with its individual kings) was subjected to many uncertainties and confusions because of its distance in time and memory. The Persians maintained fitting synchronisms with the Seleucid era and also with the Egyptian calendars,²⁸³ which were more common and useful, while no astronomer or diplomat was interested in keeping alive a detailed memory of the Parthian era, with the exception of chronologists and historians. When the Sasanian Empire collapsed, and the apocalyptic wave led to an increasing need for a comprehensible justification explaining the defeat, this was found in the assumption that the end of the millennium should be connected with a dramatic blunder, and the parallel destiny of the two main kingdoms of the Iranian past became a most

278 Humbach 1991, I: 28.

279 Cf. Klíma 1959: 556-558.

280 See again Klíma 1959: 558.

281 See Agostini 2013: 72, 114.

282 Terribili reminds me the pertinence of the Mandaean chronology, and recalls that Tabarī quotes different Arsacid lists with names and years of kingdoms. In particular, we find: a) 11 kings x 266 years; b) 13 x 266 years; c) 10 x 475 (see also Perlmann 1987 [vol. 4]: 99-101).

283 See Panaino 2011.

suitable pseudo-historical paradigm. Given that the link between Zoroaster and Alexander was older and more or less solidly fixed already in Sasanian times, the arrival of the Arabs was considered a calamity foreseen for the term of the millennium, so that the hope for an immediate revenge could be at least expected. It is in this framework that we must look for an explanation of the oversimplification of the Parthian chronology, which became one of the victims offered to a pessimistic vision of the millennium, marked by two defeats, with an intermezzo, the Parthian one, to which, despite the current negative propaganda, a positive, although only modest, meaning was nevertheless attributed.²⁸⁴ This was not sufficient to maintain the full memory of its long heritage, and probably some effects due to the “hourglass effect” inevitably exercised some influences. However, as I have remarked, the most important problem was not that of the dimidiation of the Parthian era, but the postponement of the era of Zoroaster. Here we find the key point of the whole question, to which we can answer only stating that through this expedient the Persians removed Zoroaster from a dimension inevitably confined to myth and placed him in history, at the beginning and foundation of a dynasty, as well as within a political cosmic-historical project.

We can doubt, of course, that this presentation of the Zoroastrian history, so close to the national interests of the Sasanian dynasty, was pan-Iranian and that it was shared by all the Iranian peoples in the same form as it was transmitted within the “Persian” sources. It is probable that other Mazdean communities living in ancient and late antiquity Iran, not strictly controlled by

284 In this respect we must observe that in the *Ayādgār ī Jāmāspīg* XV,6 (Agostini 2013: 108), the evaluation of the Parthian period was reasonably good, as a phase of increasing goodness for the Iranians, that paved the way to the following Sasanian kingdom.

the Sasanian authorities, had a different chronology. The same consideration concerns the fact that the Arsacids, whose historical position is normally placed some years after Alexander, were presented in the Arabo-Islamic historiography (as, for instance in Mas'ūdī)²⁸⁵ not only as *Ašghāniyān* or *Ardawān*, but also as *mulūk at-Ṭawā'if*, i.e. “Petty Kings”,²⁸⁶ a so denoted title, which cannot simply derive from an inner Parthian tradition, but it should have been attributed from outside, most probably according to a “Persian” view of Iranian history.

In the transmission of memory and history actually the main problem concerns its origin and the authority that presented a certain version of the facts. For instance, I cannot avoid mentioning the possibility that some Parthian noble houses might have played with the alleged connection between the Arsacid royal family and the Achaemenian Artaxerxes.²⁸⁷ This tradition might have been used in order to claim a partial connection with the Kayāniān list of the Mazdean tradition, with which an Achaemenian line was inevitably confused, mixed and/or overlapped. This possibility would offer a justification for the apparent acceptance of the Mazdean chronolo-

285 See Mas'ūdī 1962, I: 207-9.

286 See Hämeen-Anttila 2018: 12, 79, 104, 107, 109, 112, 127, n. 242, 237; Khan 1994: 34, 40, 43, 45.

287 It was already Wikander (1938: 89-90) to focus on a passage of the *Chronographia* (see the edition by Dindorf 1829: 539-540) written by George Synkellos (a Byzantine scholar of the 8th-9th CE), probably embedding an original fragment belonging to Arrianus. This source reports an alleged claim expressed by the Parthian dynasty concerning a direct descent from one Persian king named Artaxerxes. Regardless of whether this pretention was true or false (as it seems to be), we nonetheless can observe an important motif of the Arsacid propaganda, which might have been used even in later times. Its memory was kept alive within the Parthian framework. See already Shayegan 2011; Panaino 2019b: 41.

gy fabricated within the Zoroastrian Persian Church, because it would have left room for independent and alternative association between the Aškānān past and the oldest Iranian folklore. In other words, the “Achaemenian program”, which Shayegan²⁸⁸ attributes to the Parthians, would find a far and unexpected continuation.

All these observations are foundational, and cannot be ignored in further researches, because history and memory are not neutral, and reflect a national identity, which we cannot always consider as generically Pan-Iranian, but inevitably “divided”, at least in some conditioned circumstances.

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17. Tables

Table I: from Toomer 1984: 11.

Table II-VI: from Halma 1822: 139-143.

Introduction: Reconstructed king-list

11

Ruler	Correct form	Years of reign	Total years to end of reign	Julian date of beginning of reign
Kings [of Assyria and Babylonia]				
1 Nabonassar	Nabū-našir	14	14	-746 Feb. 26
2 Nadi	Nadin	2	16	-732 Feb. 23
3 Chünzer and Por ¹¹	Ukin-zēr; Pulu	5	21	-730 Feb. 22
4 Ilulai	Elulai	5	26	-725 Feb. 21
5 Mardokempad	Marduk-apla-iddin	12	38	-723 Feb. 20
6 Arkean	Šarru-ukin	5	43	-708 Feb. 17
7 First interregnum		2	45	-703 Feb. 15
8 Belib	Bel-ibni	3	48	-701 Feb. 15
9 Aparanad	Ašur-nādin-šumi	6	54	-698 Feb. 14
10 Regebel	Nergal-ušēzib	1	55	-692 Feb. 13
11 Mesesemordak	Muēzib-Marduk	4	59	-691 Feb. 12
12 Second interregnum		8	67	-687 Feb. 11
13 Asaridin	Ašur-aḫa-iddina	13	80	-679 Feb. 9
14 Saosouchin	Šamaš-Suma-ukin	20	100	-666 Feb. 6
15 Kiniladan	Kandalānu	22	122	-646 Feb. 1
16 Nabopolassar	Nabū-apla-ušur	21	143	-624 Jan. 27
17 Nabokassar	Nabū-kudurra-ušur	43	186	-603 Jan. 21
18 Illoaroudam	Amil-Marduk	2	188	-560 Jan. 11
19 Nerigassalar	Nergal-šarra-ušur	4	192	-558 Jan. 10
20 Nabonadi	Nabū-na'id	17	209	-554 Jan. 9
Kings of the Persians				
21 Cyrus	Kūruš	9	218	-537 Jan. 5
22 Kambyses	Kambuziya	8	226	-528 Jan. 3
23 Darius I	Dārayava'u	36	262	-520 Jan. 1
24 Xerxes	χῆσαιρῆς	21	283	-485 Dec. 23
25 Artaxerxes I	Artaxšāthra	41	324	-464 Dec. 17
26 Darius II	Dārayava'u	19	343	-423 Dec. 7
27 Artaxerxes II	Artaxšāthra	46	389	-404 Dec. 2
28 Ochus	Vahauka	21	410	-358 Nov. 21
29 Arogos ¹⁴	?Hawarša	2	412	-337 Nov. 16
30 Darius III	Dārayava'u	4	416	-335 Nov. 15
31 Alexander the Macedonian	Ἀλέξανδρος	8	424	-331 Nov. 14
Kings of the Macedonians				
32 Philip who succeeded Alexander the founder	Φίλιππος	7	431	-323 Nov. 12
33 Alexander II	Ἀλέξανδρος ἑτερος	12	443	-316 Nov. 10
34 Ptolemy son of Lagos	Πτολεμαῖος Λάγου	20	463	-304 Nov. 7
35 Ptolemy Philadelphos	Φιλῶδέλφος	38	501	-284 Nov. 2
36 Ptolemy Euergetes	Εὐεργέτης	25	526	-246 Oct. 24
37 Ptolemy Philopator	Φιλοπάτωρ	17	543	-221 Oct. 18
38 Ptolemy Epiphanes	Ἐπιφανής	24	567	-204 Oct. 13
39 Ptolemy Philometor	Φιλομήτωρ	35	602	-180 Oct. 7
40 Ptolemy Euergetes II	Εὐεργέτης β'	29	631	-145 Sept. 29
41 Ptolemy Soter	Σωτήρ	36	667	-116 Sept. 21
42 Ptolemy Neos Dionysus	Διονύσιος νέος	29	696	-80 Sept. 12
43 Cleopatra	Κλεοπάτρα	22	718	-51 Sept. 5
Kings of the Romans				
44 Augustus	Augustus	43	761	-29 Aug. 31
45 Tiberius	Tiberius	22	783	14 Aug. 20
46 Gaius	Gaius	4	787	36 Aug. 14
47 Claudius	Claudius	14	801	40 Aug. 13
48 Nero	Nero	14	815	54 Aug. 10
49 Vespasian	Vespasianus	10	825	68 Aug. 6
50 Titus	Titus	3	828	78 Aug. 4
51 Domitian	Domitianus	15	843	81 Aug. 3
52 Nerva	Nerva	1	844	96 July 30
53 Trajan	Traianus	19	863	97 July 30
54 Hadrian	Hadrianus	21	884	116 July 25
55 Antoninus	Aelius Antoninus	23	907	137 July 20

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ΚΑΝΩΝ.

TABLE CHRONOLOGIQUE

DE PTOLEMÉE, THÉON, etc.

ΚΑΝΩΝ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΙΩΝ.			CANON OU TABLE DES RÉGNES		
ΕΤΗ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΙΩΝ ΠΡΙΝ ΥΕ ΑΛΕΞΑΝΔΡΟΥ, ΚΑΙ ΑΙΤΟΥ.	ΕΤΗ.	ΕΛΛΗΝΙΣΤΙΚΑ ΑΙΤΙΩΝ.	ANNÉES DES RÉGNES AVANT ALEXANDRE, ET DU SIEN.	ANNÉES.	SOMMES de ces ANNÉES.
Ναβονασσάρου	εθ	εθ	Nabonassar	14	14
Ναδίου	β	ις	Nadius	2	16
Χινζέρ και Πόρου	ε	κκ	Chinzér et Pórus	3	21
Πουλαίου	ε	κς	Poulaius	5	26
Μαρδοκემπαδου	εθ	λθ	Mardocepad	12	38
Αρκεανού	ε	μγ	Arcean	5	43
Αεκαλιέντου πρώτου	β	με	Premier interrègne	2	45
Βιλίου	γ	μν	Bilib	3	48
Απαρναδίου	ε	νθ	Aparnad	6	54
Ρηγεβλου	α	νε	Rhegebel	1	55
Μεσέσιμωρδάκου	θ	οδ	Mesésimordac	4	59
Ασαριδίντου δεύτερου	κ	ξδ	Second interrègne	8	67
Ασαριδίντου	ιγ	π	Asaridin	13	80
Σασδουχίνου	κ	ε	Sasdouchin	20	100
Κινιλανδάνου	κβ	ρβ	Ciniladan	22	122
Ναβοπολλάσσάρου	κκ	ργ	Nabopollassar	21	143
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(1) Le manuscrit 2594, van der Hagen et Bodwell, ne donne au règne entier de Constantin I que 29 ans. savoir : 4 comme païen, et 25 comme chrétien; mais il régné 30 ans pleins. *Art. de v. les dates, t. 1.*

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(1) L'an 1777 compté de l'an 1 de Philippe-Ardeus est l'an 1533 de l'ère chrétienne. Car 1777-524= 1253, année julienne de la prise de Constantinople par les Turcs sous Mahomet II.

Alessia Zubani

MAS‘ŪDĪ AND THE CHRONOLOGY OF THE ARSACID KINGS¹

Introduction

When it comes to the study of pre-Sasanian Iran, early Arabic historiography is generally considered to be of little use. Indeed, early Muslim historians seem to know nothing at all, or in some cases close to nothing, about the Achaemenids. The same observation applies to the Seleucids, the ruling dynasty in Iran after the fall of Alexander’s Empire.² Also, in the case of the Arsacids, whom Arabic historiography knows as the “Party Kings” (Ar. *Mulūk al-ṭawāʿif*), just a partial list of names and some confusing information are provided.³

This, however, is not to say that scholars of pre-Islamic Iran should do without early Arabic historiography altogether. While it may be of little use for objectively reconstructing the actual history of pre-Sasanian Iran, early Arabic historiography can indeed provide relevant

1 I would like to thank Francesco Calzolaio, Simone Cristoforetti, Jeffrey Kotyk, Yaser Malekzadeh, and Antonio Panaino for their insightful comments and suggestions on earlier drafts.

2 A few members of the Achaemenid dynasty appear within the Kayanids lineage, as in the case of Darius III (r. 336-330 BCE). References to the Seleucids, on the other hand, are found in Ṭabarī, who mentions two representatives of the dynasty, namely Seleucus Nicator and Antiochus (Ṭabarī 1893, 2:704; 1987, 96).

3 Schoeler (2020) discusses at length the question of this “national amnesia” in the pre-Islamic traditional history of Iran.

insights into how Iranians conceived of their traditional history in the Sasanian and early Islamic periods.⁴ As pointed out by Tarif Khalidi, beginning in the ninth century, Muslim historians became increasingly aware of the existence of mighty polities, both past and present, who managed to rise to glory without having an Islamic heritage.⁵ As a result, the question of how the pre-Islamic period relates to the Islamic, and vice versa, progressively moved to the fore in Arabic historiography. To learn more about the pre-Islamic past of Iran, early Muslim historians naturally turned to Iranian sources, such as Mazdean literature, and Persian informants. These provided them with an overview of the “traditional history” of Iran from the time of Gayōmart, whom they acknowledged as the first man and king, through the Pishdadids, Kayanids, Arsacids, and Sasanians, which they considered to be the four major dynasties of pre-Islamic Iran.⁶

To exemplify how early Arabic historiography can contribute to our understanding of pre-Islamic Iran, this chapter analyses the question of the Parthian dynastic periodisation in the works of Mas‘ūdī (d. ca. 960), one of the leading intellectuals of his time. Muslim historians, who regularly discuss the Arsacids (r. c. 247 BCE – 224

4 With the expression “traditional history”, I refer to the historical and partly mythical narration as conceived by the Mazdeans themselves. Elements of the “traditional Iranian history” emerge from the Avesta, Middle Persian sources, epigraphical corpus, ostraca, coins, etc. On this topic, see Yarshater (1983) and Daryaee (1995; 2016). On the idea of history in the pre-Islamic Iranian world, see Panaino (2020).

5 See Khalidi (1975, 82).

6 In the Zoroastrian tradition, Gayōmart is the first man from whom mankind descends. In the Islamic historical works, Gayōmart is often associated with Adam, which signifies that in the Iranian narration he fulfils a function like that of Adam. On this topic, see Christensen (1917, 7-106), Shaked (1987), Shaki (2000), and Cereti (2015).

CE) only in passim, provide conflicting information as to the duration of their reign period. While some, such as Dīnawarī (d. ca. 895), Ḥamza al-İşfahānī (d. ca. 960), and Mūsā b. 'Isā al-Kisrawī (fl. tenth century), consider it to have lasted about 250 years, others, such as Ibn Qutayba (d. 889) and the Persian *mōbed* Bahrām b. Mardānšāh (fl. tenth century), count it to have been over 400 years.⁷ Yet, this discrepancy is seldom subject to discussion. Mas'ūdī, however, stands as an exception to this trend.⁸ The historian mentions that he addressed the Parthian history at length in several works.⁹ Of his whole literary corpus, only two texts are extant. In both, Mas'ūdī

7 Both Mūsā b. 'Isā al-Kisrawī and Bahrām b. Mardānšāh's accounts are quoted in the *Ta'rīḥ sinī mulūk al-arḍ wa-l- anbiyā'* (*Chronology of Pre-Islamic and Islamic dynasties*) by Ḥamza al-İşfahānī (1844, 16-29). For an English translation of their reports, see Hoyland (2018, 35-44).

8 Another partial exception is Ṭabarī (d. 923), who provides a discussion on the chronology of the Arsacid kings in his *Ta'rīḥ al-rusul wa-l-mulūk* (*History of the Prophets and Kings*). Despite his presentation of three discrepant Arsacid periodisations, he does not address extensively the issue. See Ṭabarī (1893, 2:709-10; 1987, 100-101). It is worth mentioning that about a century later, Bīrūnī (d. 1048) gave much more attention to the question of the Arsacid chronology. Nevertheless, Bīrūnī seems to have derived his information from the early Arabic historiography, and especially from Ṭabarī and Mas'ūdī's works. On Bīrūnī's discussion on the Arsacid era, see Panaino's contribution in this volume.

9 In the *Kitāb al-tanbīh wa-l-işrāf*, Mas'ūdī (1893, 97; Hoyland 2018, 93), cites the titles of a few works dealing with the Arsacid periodisation. These were the *Aḥbār al-zamān* (*Accounts of Former Times*) and its sequel, the *Kitāb al-awsaṭ* (*The Intermediate Book*), the *Kitāb funūn al-ma'ārif wa-mā jarā fi l-duhūr al-sawālif* (*The Categories of Knowledge and the Events of Past Times*), the *Kitāb ḍaḥā'ir al-'ulūm wa-mā kāna fi sālif al-duhūr* (*Treasures of the Sciences and Events of Past Times*) and finally the *Kitāb al-istiḍkār li-mā jarā fi sālif al-a'sār* (*Remembrance of the Events of Past Ages*). Discussions on Mas'ūdī's lost works are Shboul (1979, 68-82) and Pellat (2010).

deals with the Parthian era and addresses the issue of the dynastic periodisation. Here, he not only acknowledges the existence of these incompatible chronologies, but even elaborates on why this is the case with reference to the information he acquired from his informants, a group of Zoroastrian clerics from “the lands of the Persians” (Ar. *arḍ al-a‘ājim*).¹⁰ Inasmuch as these excerpts rely on information derived from Persian sources and informants, they open a window on how Iranian intellectuals from the Sasanian and post-Sasanian periods conceived of their national history.

The Chronology of the Arsacid Kings in the *Murūj al-ḍahab wa-ma‘ādin al-jawhar*

The section on the Arsacids from the *Murūj al-ḍahab wa-ma‘ādin al-jawhar* (*Meadows of Gold and Mines of Gems*), a comprehensive world history spanning from the Islamic world to several non-Muslim lands, from China to Greece, offers an excellent starting point for our discussion. The historian begins by providing a general account of the Parthians, whom, reflecting their supposedly decentralised form of government, he knows as the “Party kings”.¹¹ Here, he characterises the Arsacid dynasty (*al-Ašġāniya*) as their most powerful lineage and reports that ruled in Iran from Alexander’s death up to Ardašīr I’s rise

10 On the terms “Ajam” and “Furs” used in the Arabic literature to denote the Persians, see respectively Gabrieli (2012) and Pellat (2012).

11 The Parthians brought together various kingdoms and vassal states. To take this characteristic into account, the expression ‘Parthian Commonwealth’ has recently been introduced to replace the notion of a ‘Parthian Empire’. On this question, see de Jong (2013), Gregoratti (2019) and Ellerbrock (2021, 4; 71). On the Arabic designation *Mulūk al-ṭawāʾif*; see Morony and Wasserstein (2012).

to power. Then, he proceeds to elaborate on the issue of the Parthian periodisation. At first, he presents a longer chronology:

According to several authors dealing with the history of the past and the knowledge of chronology, [the reign] of the Party kings lasted for 517 years, from Alexander's reign up to the moment Ardašīr b. Bābak rose, defeated the Party kings, killed Ardawān, king of 'Irāq, and placed Ardawān's crown on his head, after a single combat on the banks of the Tigris.¹²

A few lines later, however, he reports an entirely different tradition in which only eleven of the about thirty rulers known to scholarship appear, for a grand total of 288 years (see table). To account for this discrepancy, he writes the following:

This is another view compared to what we introduced before. The chronology of the Party kings is presented in a different form from what we reported, and the length of their reign is shorter than the one we described. The first [periodisation], however, is the best known and the most accurate as to the span of years they reigned; on the other hand, chronicles present divergences going as far as open contradictions. We took [this number] from Persian scholars ('ulamā' *al-Furs*), who put more care than others into the conservation of their ancestors' history given that they have religious respect for it [which provides them rules] in word and deed. Other people, because of the differences that occur between followers of different revealed religions, say that in word but do not follow it in action.¹³

Mas'ūdī makes some surprising considerations re-

12 Mas'ūdī (1863a, 2:135)

13 Mas'ūdī (1863a, 2:137–38).

garding the coexistence of the two divergent dynastic periodisations. The historian begins by noting that the long chronological figure is the most well-known and historically accurate. This suggests that such a periodization was considered the standard during his time, as further confirmed by Ibn Qutayba (d. 889), Bahrām ibn Mardānšāh, Ṭabarī (d. 923), and the *Ġurar aḥbār mulūk al-Furs wa-siyarihīm* (*History and biographies of the kings of the Persians*) of the pseudo-Ta‘ālibī, all of which favour the longer chronology over the shorter.¹⁴ Furthermore, Mas‘ūdī asserts its accuracy based on the testimony of several Persian scholars, whom he describes as especially thorough in keeping annalistic and biographical records due to the religious significance they attribute to such documents. But where does the shorter chronology come from then? Mas‘ūdī answers this question by anchoring his discussion on a different corpus of sources. While the longer periodisation relies on the works of Iranian scholars, he explains, the shorter one derives from Abū ‘Ubayda Ma‘mar ibn al-Muṭannā (d. 825), an Arabic philologist of Iranian ancestry:¹⁵

Abū ‘Ubayda Ma‘mar ibn al-Muṭannā, the Yemeni, has reported [information on the Arsacid kings] from ‘Umar Kisrā, in one of his books on the stories of the Persians (*aḥbār al-Furs*) in which he describes the classes of their kings, the predecessors and the posterity, and the stories

14 See, respectively, Ibn Qutayba (1969, 653), Bahrām ibn Mardānšāh (Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī 1844, 27; Hoyland 2018, 41-44), Ṭabarī (1893, 2:709–10; 1987, 100–101), and the pseudo-Ta‘ālibī (1900, 457–58).

15 Ibn al-Nadīm (1970, 1:116–18) offers some pieces of information on Abū ‘Ubayda’s life and work. Mas‘ūdī mentions him a few times both in the *Kitāb al-tanbīh wa-l-iṣrāf* (al-Mas‘ūdī 1893, 102) and in the *Muruj al-ḍahab wa-ma‘adain al-jawahr* (al-Mas‘ūdī 1863a, 2:112; 136; 237–38). On his historiographical activity, see Madelung (1992) and Weipert (2007).

about them, their speeches, the ramifications of their genealogies.¹⁶

Mas'ūdī mentions Abū 'Ubayda's book on several occasions, but he never reports its title. According to Ibn al-Nadīm (d. 990), who was certainly well informed on the literary production of his time, Abū 'Ubayda had authored a *Kitāb faḍā'il al-Furs* (*Excellencies of Persia*).¹⁷ The book is no longer extant. Its title, however, suggests a match with the book about the history of the Persians mentioned by Mas'ūdī. In any case, to learn more about where the information reported by Mas'ūdī comes from, we can turn to Abū 'Ubayda's own source, 'Umar Kistrā.

Not unlike Abū 'Ubayda himself, 'Umar Kistrā seems to be quite an obscure figure.¹⁸ Primary sources are generally silent about his life and literary production. Nevertheless, his name occurs with some frequency in early Arabic historiography, always in connection with the history of ancient Iran. Mas'ūdī himself, for instance, characterises him as “famous in the knowledge of the Persians and the stories of their kings, so much so that he was given the nickname (*laqab*) 'Umar Kistrā”.¹⁹ The same information occurs in the *Ta'rīḥ Baġdād* (*History of Baghdad*) by the historian al-Ḥaṭīb al-Baġdādī (d. 1071), according to whom 'Umar Kistrā had good knowledge of the stories of the Persians and the Sasanian kings (*mulūk al-akāsira*).²⁰ All of the above confirms that 'Umar Kistrā was indeed especially knowledgeable about the stories and traditions of pre-Islamic Iran.

16 Mas'ūdī (1863a, 2:136).

17 Ibn al-Nadīm (1970, 1:117). On Abū 'Ubayda's *Kitāb faḍā'il al-Furs*, see Hämeen-Anttila (2018, 104–5).

18 On 'Umar Kistrā, see Hämeen-Anttila (2018, 74–75).

19 Mas'ūdī (1863a, 2:112).

20 See Ḥaṭīb al-Baġdādī (2011, 10:280–81).

With these considerations in mind, it will not come as a surprise to learn that Mas‘ūdī identifies the source for the shorter Arsacid chronology (288 years vs. 517) precisely as ‘Umar Kistrā. Indeed, this chronological figure is a staple in Mazdean religious sources.²¹ The origin of this chronology is still a subject of discussion. In any case, that ‘Umar reported this figure indicates his confidence with sources by authors familiar with Pre-Islamic Iran. This shortened chronological figure, for instance, occurs in the apocalyptic and eschatological text *Ayādgār ī Jāmāspīg* (*Memorial of Jāmāsp*, chapter 15), which refers to a length of 282 years.²² Similarly, the *Bundahišn* (*Primal Creation*, chapter 36), a religious compilation centred on cosmogonical and cosmographical matters, reports that the Arsacids ruled for 284 years.²³ In their present form, both texts date to the early Islamic period. However, there is little doubt that the reduced Arsacid chronology was already current at least in the late Sasanian period. This is attested in an external source, the *Histories* of the sixth-century Byzantine Agathias (II,26,1), who attributes to the Arsacids 270 years of rule – a figure close to that

21 In his contribution in the present volume, Agostini (202-203) recalls that the Parthian kings are sometimes regarded positively in the Middle Persian literature. For instance, *Bundahišn* (36.9), *Dēnkard* (4.168), and *Zand ī Wahman Yasn* (3.26) consider them as preservers of Zoroastrianism. For a discussion of the Mazdean chronology, see Panaino’s study in this volume.

22 A French translation of the selected passage in the *Ayādgār ī Jāmāspīg* is Agostini (2013, 108–9). On this topic, see Agostini’s contribution in this volume.

23 As pointed out by Agostini and Thrope (2020, 191), the source of this chronology may have been the lost *Čīhrdād Nask* of the *Avesta* and the *Xwadāy Nāmag*. For an English translation of chapter 36, see pp. 191-192.

reported in Middle Persian literature.²⁴ This is especially relevant because Agathias (IV.30) claims to have learnt about Persian history from the Persian Royal Annals, which were supplied to him by his friend and famous translator Sergius, who was much appreciated by Ḥusraw I.²⁵

The reduction of the Arsacid dynastic periodisation in the *Kitāb al-tanbih wa-l-išrāf*: a secret Sasanian plan?

Mas'ūdī does not address the issue of the Arsacid chronology only in the *Murūj al-dahab*. The *Kitāb al-tanbih wa-l-išrāf*, a work devoted to the description of astronomical and meteorological phenomena as well as geographical, chronological, and historical overviews, indeed offers another detailed account on the subject. Once more, the information occurs in the section about the history of ancient Iran. The historian begins with some preliminary remarks concerning the Parthians. Then, he moves to provide a list of their rulers, accompanied by their respective years on the throne:

Among the Party Kings only the Arsacids are accounted for in the histories and biographies because of the strength of their rank and the good order of their rule, as we have mentioned. The first who is reckoned to belong to them is Ašak b. Ašak b. Ardawān b. Ašāgān b. Aš the

24 An English translation of Agathias is Frendo (Agathias 1975, 60). The literature on Agathias' discussion of Iranian history is rich. See Cameron (1969-1970), Gnoli (2004), and Gariboldi (2005). It is noteworthy that Agathias (IV.24,1) also mentions a length of 538 years for the period between Alexander and the beginning of the Sasanian empire (Agathias 1975, 126). On this question, see the detailed bibliography offered by Panaino in note 68 in the present volume.

25 On this topic, see Cameron 1969-1970.

Tyrant b. Siyāwahš b. Kay Qāwus the king, and he reigned for 10 years. Then followed Sābūr b. Ašak, who reigned for 60 years; Gūdarz b. Ašak, 10 years; Bīzan b. Sābūr, 21 years; Gūdarz b. Bīzan, 19 years; Narsī b. Bīzan, 40 years; Hurmuz b. Bīzan, 19 years; Ardawān the Elder, 12 years; Ḥusraw b. Ardawān, 40 years; Balāš b. Ḥusraw, 24 years; and Ardawān the Younger, 13 years. This is the sum of what is known of the enumeration of the Party Kings and the years of their reigns; they number 11 and ruled for 268 years. There were other kings that belonged to this category, but their names and the duration of their reigns are unknown and are not recorded in any books of the Persians or any biographical histories of kings (*siyar al-mulūk*), because of the troubled state of government in that time, the contention arising from difference of authority and factionalism, the predominance acquired by each king in his region and because of something that Ardašīr son of Bābak did, which we will mention at the end of this chapter.²⁶

This excerpt allows us to appreciate Mas‘ūdī’s caution in approaching the issue of the Arsacid chronology. Indeed, the list of rulers is immediately followed by a disclaimer, advising the reader that the information provided may very well be incomplete as “there were other kings that belonged to this category” about whom, however, nothing is known anymore. To account for this fact, Mas‘ūdī invokes the political instability characterising the Parthian era. Yet, this is not all. Compounding the issue, he claims, is in fact “something that Ardašīr son of Bābak did,” which caused the history of the Parthian kings to become even more obscure. Here, however, we

26 English translation by Hoyland (2018, 95), which I slightly modified on the basis of the Arabic text edited by de Goeje (al-Mas‘ūdī 1893, 95–96). The same applies for the following quotations from the *Kitāb al-tanbīh*, for which I will provide the references both to the Arabic text and the English translation.

risk getting ahead of ourselves. Before moving on to the discussion about Ardašīr's mysterious interference, let us take a few moments to point to another aspect stressed by Mas'ūdī. The historian shows he is aware that the rule of 268 years does not correspond to the actual chronological figure of the Parthians. He thus emphasises that the correct duration of the Arsacid reign is 513 years.²⁷ To support his argument, Mas'ūdī shows some basic calculations:

According to those who are concerned with the histories of ancient nations and their kings, the correct figure for the duration of the era of the Party Kings from the killing of Dāriūš, that is Dārā b. Dārā, and the rise of Ardašīr b. Bābak is 513 years. Here is how we arrive at that. From the beginning of the year in which Alexander, son of Philip, the king of Macedonia, became king, up to our time, which is the year 345 AH [956 CE], is 1267 years. If we subtract from that the difference between the years 345 and 32 AH – the year in which King Yazdgird b. Šahriyār was killed – which is 313 years, and [if we also subtract] the number of years that the Sasanian Persians ruled, which was 439 years, that which remains after that is the number of years from the killing of Dāriūš, who was Dārā b. Dārā, by Alexander and the rise of Ardašīr b. Bābak, namely 513 years. This is therefore the duration of the rule of the Party Kings.²⁸

Here too, as in the *Murūj al-ḡahab*, Mas'ūdī thus confirms the accuracy of the long dynastic chronology recounted by “those who are concerned with the his-

27 It is worth mentioning that these figures differ from those provided in the *Murūj al-ḡahab*, amounting respectively to 517 and 288. This may be due to a number of reasons, including a miscalculation on the part of Mas'ūdī, clerical errors, or the historian's reliance on different sources.

28 See Mas'ūdī (1893, 96–97) and Hoyland (2018, 92–93).

tories of ancient nations and their kings”. Elsewhere, the historian informs the reader that, since he already discussed the question in some of his other writings, here he will limit himself to briefly touch upon the issue. Unfortunately, none of these works are extant. We are, therefore, left with the few words offered here. On the bright side, however, these do shed light on that “something” that Ardašīr son of Bābak “did” and which caused the history of the Parthians to become especially obscure:²⁹

As regards the era of Alexander [the Great] there exists a substantial difference between the Persians and other nations that have been neglected by many people. It is one of the religious and state secrets of the Persians (*huwa sirr diyānī wa mulūkī min asrār al-Furs*) scarcely known to any except the priests and clerics and to men of learning and knowledge, as we witnessed in the provinces of Fārs, Kirmān, and elsewhere in the lands of the Persians (*šahada-nā bārḍ Fārs wa Kirmān wa-ġair-humā min arḍ al-a‘ā-jim*). It is not found in any of the books composed about the history of the Persians or in books of biographies and chronologies. It resides in the fact that Zoroaster b. Būršasb b. Isbīmān stated in the Avesta, which is in their view the book sent down [by God] to him, that their rule would be shaken after 300 years and that their religion would disappear altogether. Now between Zoroaster and Alexander there were about 300 years, for Zoroaster appeared in the reign of Kay Bištās b. Kay Luhrās b. according to the report of him that we presented above in the earlier part of this book, and Ardašīr b. Bābak seized power and reunited the kingdoms 510 years or so after Alexander. He [Ardašīr] observed that the time left be-

29 Ardašīr I’s predication is a recurrent topos of the Arabic and Persian literature, such as the *Testament of Ardašīr*, the *Letter of Tansar*, the *Nihāyat al-arab*, the *Šāhnāma* (*Book of the kings*) of Firdawsī (d. 1020), and the *Tajārib al-umam* (*Experiences of Nations*) by Ibn Miskawayh (d. 1030). On this topos, see Askari (2016, 167–68).

fore the completion of the millennium was only about 200 years and so he sought to extend the [life of the] empire by a further 200 years, for he feared that after 200 years had passed the people would cease to support the empire and defend it, trusting in the report of their prophet about its demise. He therefore deducted about half of the 510 years or so that were between him and Alexander, and he recorded only the Party Kings who ruled in these years [that he acknowledges] and omitted the rest. He thereafter proclaimed in his realm that his emergence and subjugation of the Party Kings and killing of Ardawān, who was the most powerful among them and had the greatest army, occurred only in the year 260 after Alexander. Thus, he encouraged this chronology, and it became widespread among the people. This is why the disagreement arose between the Persians and other nations and why the chronology of the years of the Party Kings became so confused.³⁰

According to Mas'ūdī's excerpt, the Persians were deeply worried by the approaching end of the millennium and the fulfilment of Zoroaster's prophecy. Ardašīr I would have faced this dreadful event by cutting from the chronology the missing time span expected before the conclusion of the millennium, thereby extending the duration of his dynasty. Subsequently, the new calculation produced a shortage by about 200 years of the duration previously attributed to the Arsacid kings.

In the present volume, Panaino provides an in-depth discussion of the issue of "Ardašīr's secret" and the creation of a foundational Mazdean chronology. Therefore, these questions need not concern us here. Rather, I would like to focus on a few details concerning the origin of the information about Ardašīr's secret resolution. In his works, Mas'ūdī records his personal experiences and contacts during his many journeys in both Muslim and

30 See Mas'ūdī (1893, 97–98) and Hoyland (2018, 93–94).

non-Muslim lands. His first journeys took him through present-day Iran, Pakistan, and the western coast of India. Next, he travelled through Oman, Yemen, Syria, Iraq, the Caspian Sea region, the Caucasus, and Egypt. In Iran, he visited a few important centres such as Iṣṭaḥr, in Fārs, Ahwāz, in Ḥūzistān, as well as the Sīstān and Ḥurāsān regions, where he was able to visit ancient sites and Zoroastrian fire-temples.³¹ The historian reports that he set out to travel driven by a genuine eagerness for knowledge and the idea that direct experience is the best way to understand distant countries and communities.³² That is also why he regularly strove to meet with Muslim and non-Muslim scholars and clergymen. Thus, it should not surprise us that he could learn about “Ardašīr’s secret” from Persian informants, who he could meet and question “in the province of Fārs, Kirmān, and elsewhere in the lands of the Persians”.

On several occasions, Mas‘ūdī also quotes from some Mazdean texts and other Persian books he had the opportunity to see. One of them was an Arabic translation of a Middle Persian text found in a Sasanian royal archive detailing the biographical overviews and the portraits of each Sasanian king and queen.³³ When writing on the history of the Persians, Mas‘ūdī could therefore recall information derived from clerics and members of the Zoroastrian communities (as in the case of “Ardašīr’s secret”) as well as books recognised as authoritative by Zoroastrian members. Yet, these were not the only sources available to him. His works indeed indicate that

31 See Mas‘ūdī (1863b, 4:76–79). On Mas‘ūdī travels, see Shboul (1979, 1–28).

32 Shboul (1979, 4).

33 Mas‘ūdī (1893, 106–7). Ḥamza al-Iṣṫahānī (1961, 48–62) mentions the same book with the title *Kitāb ṣuwar mulūk Banī Sāsān* (*Book of portraits of the Sasanian kings*).

he assembled a corpus of sources, also including historical and administrative texts translated into Arabic from Middle Persian, speeches and letters cited in Arabic without reference to sources and Arabic works by named authors.³⁴ A few lines after having discussed the alleged secret of Ardašīr, for instance, Mas'ūdī quotes from the *'Ahd Ardašīr* (*Testament of Ardašīr*) and the *Letter of Tansar*, two Arabic renditions of Middle Persian texts.³⁵ It is worth mentioning that the historian refers to these two texts to highlight how traces of Ardašīr's secret political resolution could in fact be found in the literature, despite having remarked that only the Zoroastrian clerics and men of learning were informed about it. In any case, Mas'ūdī's scholarly interests vis-à-vis the history of pre-Islamic Iran emerge from this picture. As he clearly explains in the very first pages of the *Kitāb al-tanbīh* (1893, 6), the history of ancient Iran requires the attention of historians since their kings were able to establish the highest form of political organisation possible before Islam.

Conclusions

The chronicles of Agathias testify that the reduced chronology of the Arsacid kings was established in the Sasanian period at least as early as the era of Ḥusraw I (r. 531-579).³⁶ Of course, that does not prove

34 Cooperson (2011).

35 For the Arabic text of the *'Ahd Ardašīr* see 'Abbās (1967). Studies on this work are Grignaschi (1966, 1-3; 46-90), Askari (2016, 153-70) and Zubani (2017). The *Letter of Tansar* only survives in a later New Persian translation by Ibn Isfandiyār (13th century). For the Persian text and the English translation, see respectively Ibn Isfandiyār (2010, 12-41) and Boyce (1968). See also the translation and studies by Darmesteter (1894) and Christensen (1932).

36 This was first remarked by Klíma (1959, 563), in contrast

that the new periodisation was introduced during Ardašīr's reign to alleviate a millennial fear, as suggested by Mas'ūdī. Still, that the historian could learn about Ardašīr I's alleged secret from contemporary Zoroastrian intellectuals suggests that the shortened foundational chronology was further known and used within the Zoroastrian communities. In this respect, Panaino in his contribution argues that the elaboration of a reduced Parthian chronology resulted from an attempt by Sasanian elites at rewriting the history of Iran for ideological and political aims. To this end, the Mazdean clergy seems to have superimposed the era of Zoroaster, which was traditionally related to the semi-mythic Kayanid dynasty, with the Seleucid Era, thus anchoring the figure of the prophet in history. This, we now know, was devised to satisfy internal ideological purposes, and did not preclude the use of other chronologies. Inasmuch as it demonstrates that Zoroastrian intellectuals were aware that there was another, longer chronology of the Parthian kings, Mas'ūdī's account supports this interpretation.

In any case, Mas'ūdī's writings prove to be relevant to historians of late antique and medieval Iran, in that they allow us to glimpse the processes that gave rise to a national account of Iranian history in the late Sasanian and early Islamic periods.

with Spiegel (1878, 3:192), who argued that the reduced Persian chronology was established after the defeat of the Sasanian empire. Chapter 4 of Panaino's contribution discusses in depth the question of the establishment of the short chronology.

Table:

Mas'ūdī's shortened dynastic periodisation of the Arsacid kings

Kings	<i>Murūj al-ḡahab</i>	<i>Kitāb al-tanbih</i>
Ašak b. Ašak	20	10
Šabūr b. Ašak	60	60
Gūdarz b. Ašak	10	10
Bīzan ³⁷ b. Šabūr	21	21
Gūdarz b. Bīzan	19	19
Narsī b. Bīzan	40	40
Hurmuz b. Bīzan	25	19
Ardawān the Elder	15	12
Ḥusraw b. Ardawān	40	40
Balāš b. Ḥusraw	25	24
Ardawān b. Balāš	13	13
TOTAL	288	268

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37 In the *Murūj al-ḡahab*, Bizan is called with the name Nīzar.

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Domenico Agostini

SOME OBSERVATIONS
ON THE AYĀDGĀR Ī JĀMĀSPĪG 15

Chapter 15 of the encyclopedic Zoroastrian book, *Ayādgār ī Jāmāspīg*,¹ offers a list of Iranian kings following the mythical King Wištāsp until the last Sasanian king, Yazdegard III:²

Kings	Duration
Wahman (Ardašīr) son of Spandyād	112
Humāy, daughter of Wahman	30
Darius son of Wahman	n/a
Darius son of Darius	13
Alexander the Great	13
Arsacides	282
Ardašīr I	14 (13)
Šābuhr I	20

1 For the critical edition, translation, and a historical-religious commentary of the text, see Agostini 2013.

2 The dates between parentheses are those found in the Pāzand tradition. The underlined dates are those wrong or corrupted according to the historiographical information. In the compound dates, the first numeral corresponds to years, the second to months, and the third to days (i.e., 3.3.3= 3 years, 3 months, and 3 days). For the dates of kings not attested in the text, “n/a” was used.

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Hormizd I	1.2 (1.10)
Wahrām I	n/a
Wahrām II	n/a
Wahrām III Sagān-šāh	40 (4)
Narseh	9
Hormizd II	n/a
Šābuhr II	72
Ardašīr II	n/a
Šābuhr III	75 (n/a)
Wahrām IV Kermān-šāh	11
Yazdegard I	21.5
Wahrām V Gōr	23.10
Yazdegard II	15,4 (18,4)
Hormizd III	n/a
Pērōz	22
Walgaš	4
Kawād + Jāmāsp	42 (2)
Husraw I Anōšag-ruwān	47.7.7
Hormizd IV	12
Husraw II Abarwēz	37
Kawād II Šērōy	9
Ardašīr III	1.5
Šahrwarāz	n/a
Husraw III	n/a
Bōrān	n/a
Āzarmīgduxt	n/a
Hormizd V	n/a
Husraw IV	n/a
Yazdegard III	20 (10)

Unlike other Pahlavi texts, such as the *Bundahišn* 36, *Dēnkard* IV, and *Zand ī Wahman Yasn* 1 and 3,³ which contain partial lists of mythical or/and Sasanian rulers, the narrative scheme of this chapter, though concise, seems to recall the more detailed lists of Iranian kings in Persian and Arabic from the early Islamic period.

As for most of the seventeen chapters of the *Ayādgār ī Jāmāspīg*, chapter 15 has come down to us in two versions: the first, in Pāzand – traditionally considered as Middle Persian transliterated in Avestan script –⁴ and the second, in Pārsi – traditionally considered as Middle Persian transliterated in Arabo-Persian. It is likely that the tradition of Pārsi manuscripts was dependent on the Pāzand.⁵

However, despite the grammatical and syntactical peculiarities, both in the Pāzand and Pārsi traditions, they reveal a very late language. This chapter undoubtedly had an original Pahlavi model. In fact, together with a number of Pahlavisms (e.g. *vattar*), chapter 15 displays five times (15:16-19, 27) a grossly incorrect transcription of the Pahlavi word 𐭣𐭥𐭩𐭥 [yzdkrt] /yazdegard/, that is, the name of some Sasanian kings. Pāzand manuscript RJ has the transcription 𐭣𐭥𐭩𐭥 /šakūt/ and, likely following the wrong Pāzand transcription, Pārsi manuscript M52 gives شکوت. The evident misinterpretation of the Pahlavi script confirms the existence of a Pahlavi tradition of the chapter, but also demonstrates that, among the medieval

3 For the edition and translation of these passages, see respectively Pakzad 2005: 410-414, Agostini and Thrope 2020: 192-193; Cereti 1995: 181-183; Cereti 1995: 133-135, 149-152.

4 On the Pāzand language and its use and relation with Pahlavi, see de Jong 2003; Azarnouche 2014.

5 On the history and the complex and problematic transmission of the manuscripts of the *Ayādgār ī Jāmāspīg*, see Agostini 2014.

Parsee copyists in India, the knowledge and the recognition of the name of Yazdegard, especially the last one (III) was somehow surprisingly obscure.

Concerning the contents, the chapter is related to the following apocalyptic chapter 16 (or also *Jāmāsp-Nāmāg*).⁶ In fact, King Wištāsp asks Zoroaster not only about the length and the nature of each kingdom after him, but also presents a rhetorical question about the destiny of the Mazdean *dēn*⁷ (15:2), which foretells the apocalyptic scenario of chapter 16.

As for the pre-Sasanian pseudo-historical kings, both the Pāzand and Pārsi versions do not list Darius son of Wahman, who appears to precede Darius son of Darius (Dārāy ī Dārāyān) in the *Bundahišn* (36:9) and also in several Persian and Arabic lists of Iranian kings. In this case, it might simply be a corruption in the insertion of the figure of the queen Humāy (also called Cīhr-āzād), and also a corruption of the kings Darius son of Wahman and Darius son of Darius, which happened in the Sasanian period through the mediation of the Jewish tradition.⁸

Just like the *Bundahišn* 36:9, *Dēnkard* 4.168 (which concerns the transmission of faith) and *Zand ī Wahman Yasn* 3:26 (which concerns the representation of the seven metallic ages of the world), *Ayādgar ī Jāmāspīg* 15:6 also presents the Arsacid dynasty in a positive way,

6 For the edition and translation of the Pārsi and Pahlavi versions of this important chapter, see Agostini 2013: 74-83, 109-114, 179-192.

7 This concept is used in a way that overlaps somewhat with the modern concept of religion. In this sense, the *dēn* is the good religion (*hu-dēn*), the Mazdā-worshipping religion, Zoroastrianism, in its widest sense. It is not just the *Avesta*, but its commentaries and translations, the *Zand*; not just Zoroastrian works proper, but all wisdom and truth.

8 See Panaino here above, p. 39.

which differs from the official Sasanian propaganda.⁹ It assigns to the Arsacid dynasty the length of two hundred and eighty-two years, which corresponds more or less to the two hundred and eighty-four years one finds in the manuscripts of the *Indian Bundahišn*.¹⁰ It is important to remark that, on the contrary, the extant manuscripts of the *Iranian Bundahišn*,¹¹ which are more recent than those of the Indian version, report two-hundred years and something more (*dō sad ud and*), just as the *Šāhnāma* does (سالی دویست).¹² The existence of these two versions is explainable only if we assume that several traditions circulated at the same time in the Zoroastrian communities. Furthermore, given the great celebrity and diffusion of the *Ayādgār ī Jāmāspīg* in India until the beginning of the twentieth century, one may assume that this text reported the same tradition, perhaps corrupted in the extant Pāzand and Pārsi manuscripts, of the *Indian Bundahišn*.

In general, the Pāzand and Pārsi versions of chapter 15 do not differ so much. Except for some historical blunders and/or various corruptions due to the textual transmission, the source of this list seems to follow those of the main Persian and Arab chronological lists of

9 On the Sasanian propaganda against Parthians, see Gnoli 1989: 141. Contra see Olbrycht 2016. Mary Boyce (1989: 127) argues for the presence of a Parthian substrate in the text, considering two aspects: the use of the Parthian title *bidaxš* (viceroys, constables) assigned to Jāmāsp (a title that can also be found in *Ayādgār ī Zarērān* 35) and the positive role assigned to Arsacids.

10 For the different reading in the Indian and Iranian traditions, see Pakzad 2005: 414 and n. 106.

11 The *Iranian or Greater Bundahišn*, whose manuscripts originally came from Iran, contains a long version of the book composed of thirty-six chapters. A corrupted, shorter version of the book, whose manuscripts come from India, is termed the *Indian Bundahišn*.

12 For the translation of this passage, see Davis 2006: 529.

kings, in particular that of al-Ṭabari and al-Bīrūnī.¹³ The Pāzand version (Ohrmazd I, Wahrām III Saġān-šāh, and Yazdegard II) and both versions of the chapter (Yazdegard I, Wahrām V Gōr, and Ardašīr III) report the duration of kingdoms, sometimes mistakenly, as it appears in al-Ṭabari and al-Bīrūnī, and that differs, for instance, from what one knows from Agathias and the *Šāhnāma*.¹⁴

As for the completeness of the list of the Sasanian kings, it is important to note that the suzerains following Ardašīr III until Yazdegard III are omitted, contrary to what happens in the late Persian and Arabic sources. The reasons for this omission could be the fact that these kings and queens were not perceived by Zoroastrian authors to belong to the dynastic line and/or they were not worthy enough to be mentioned because of their short periods of regency.

Probably one of the most interesting but obscure bits of information is the prophecy at the end of the chapter which, according to the Pārsi version, assigns to the Arabs a dominion of three hundred and eighty-two years, nine months, seven days, and four hours after the conquest of Ērānšahr, that is around 1033 CE. A similar prophecy on the fall of Arabs is found in the *Bundahišn* 36:9 where their end is expected in the year 447 of the Parsīg era, that is 1098 CE. As for the *Bundahišn*, I tentatively assume that this prophecy could refer, perhaps generically, to the events which accompanied the rise of the Turkish dynasty of the Seljuqs, who were likely perceived by Zoroastrians as potential enemies of the Arab caliphate.¹⁵

13 On the sources of the Arabic chronological lists of Persian kings, see Bosworth 1999: xv-xxiv; Hoyland 2018: 1-23

14 For the translation of the histories of al-Ṭabari, al-Bīrūnī, and Agathias, and of the *Šāhnāma*, see respectively Bosworth 1999; Sachau 1879; Frendo 1975; Davis 2006.

15 On the rise of Seljuqs and its social, religious, and political implications, see Bašan 2010.

However, in the main and most ancient Pāzand manuscript RJ,¹⁶ the reading of the first part of this number 𐭪𐭫𐭬𐭭𐭮𐭯 /+hasat/ is not clear. If one assumes that 𐭪𐭫𐭬 is an erroneous reading for the original Pahlavi numeral 𐭪𐭫 [2] /dō/ “two”, one should read the total time frame of the prophecy as two hundred and eighty-two years, nine months, seven days, and four hours. It means that the fall of the Arabs should occur in 933 CE. This alternative date may connect to the prophecy of the tenth-century Ziyarid prince of Gīlān Mardāwīj. In 934 CE, after he defeated the Deylamite warlord Asfār b. Šīrūya (931 CE), Mardāwīj chose the model of the tiara of Husraw I and publicly announced his intention to restore the Iranian monarchy, following the defeat of the Samanids and the Abbasid caliphate as Mas‘ūdī says.¹⁷ Frantz Grenet has convincingly identified him with the man of Padišxwārgar (Tabaristan), who will restore Ēranšahr and the Zoroastrian religion with the help of the immortal Pišōtan from Kangdiz, as it appears in the *Ayādgār ī Jāmāspīg* 16:43-54.¹⁸ Nevertheless, this prophecy is subject to further investigation, since it is problematic.

In conclusion, as for most of the chapters of the *Ayādgār ī Jāmāspīg*, it seems more plausible to set the his-

16 For the passage in the original Pāzand manuscript and its edition, see Agostini 2013: 207, 437. Late Pāzand manuscript DS2, which depends on RJ, gives the unlikely reading /dah sat/. It might be a later interpolation of the copyist, who simply interpreted the mistaken Pāzand transcription in RJ.

17 See Barbier de Meynard and Pavet de Courteille 1877: 27-28; Grenet 2015: 112.

18 See Grenet 2015: 111-114. The epoch of Mardāwīj corresponds to the prophecy of the restoration of Zoroastrianism that was connected to the anniversary of 1500 years of Zoroaster (see Stoyanov 2000:156). Tavadia (1956: 126) already argued that the prophecy in the *Ayādgār ī Jāmāspīg* seems to be an astrological calculation on the basis of some sort of historical event.

torical context of chapter 15 in the early centuries of the Islamic period. The prophecy of the fall of Arabs, which is found in the Pārsi version, seems to set the date of its last composition in the Seljuqid period, though the Pāzand version of the prophecy seems to testify to a previous and continuous reworking following the apocalyptic vicissitudes of the Zoroastrian community.

Appendix¹⁹

1) King Wištāsp asked: “After us, sovereign and lord, who and which lord will protect this fortunate throne? Who will be his father? Who will be the sons and of what stock?”
 2) How many years will each <of them> hold the country? Which of them <will> be good and which <will> be evil? After us what era and what times will come? Until when and for how many years will the Mazdean religion last?

3) Jāmāsp, <the *bidaxš*>²⁰ answered him: “I will tell you! After you, this fortunate throne will pass to Wahman, son of Spandyād,²¹ and he will hold the country under <his> power for one hundred and twelve years, and his daughter Humāy, who is called Cihr-āzād, will reign for thirty years. 4) Darius, son of Darius, will reign for thirteen years. 5) After him Alexander, the Roman <will reign> for thirteen years;

19 The translation is based on the edition of the Pārsi manuscript M52 by Agostini (2013). Emendations to M52 from the Pāzand manuscripts RJ and DS2 are marked in the footnotes.

20 Pāzand manuscripts add it. On this word of Parthian origin, see the interesting study by Szemerényi (1975: 360–67, 375, 391).

21 Pāzand manuscripts correctly have it. Pārsi manuscript M51 has *urdībihišt isfandyār*. The first name which is the name of a Zoroastrian *amahraspand* (beneficent immortal), Phl. Ardwhišt is probably a corruption of the name Ardašīr, another name for Wahman, son of Spandyād.

6) Then the stock of Ašk²² will arrive: <the kingship> will reach the famous Parthians and they will hold it for two hundred and eighty-two years. Under these lords the end of misfortunes <will come> little by little; then absolute happiness will arrive and the country will be established prosperous and brave, and men will live according to their desire.

7) Then the kingship will pass to Ardašīr, son of Pābag, he will hold the country under <his> power for fourteen years. 8) Šābuhr, son of Ardašīr, for twenty years, 9) Šābuhr, son of Šābuhr, for one year, 10) Hormizd, the valiant, for one year and two months; 11) Wahrām, son of Wahrām, who is called Sagān-Šāh, for forty years, 12) Narseh, brother of Wahrām, for nine years; 13) Šābuhr, son of Hormizd, for seventy-two years, 14) Šābuhr, son of Šābuhr,²³ for five years, 15) Wahrām, son of Šābuhr, who is called Kermān-Šāh, for eleven years; 16) Yazdegard, son of Šābuhr, for twenty-one years and five months, 17) Wahrām, son of Yazdegard, who is called Wahrām Gōr, for twenty-three years and ten months; 18) Yazdegard, son of Wahrām, for fifteen years and four months, 19) Pērōz, son of Yazdegard, for twenty-two years, 20) Walaxš, son of Pērōz, for four years; 21) Kawād, son of Pērōz, with Jāmāsp, for forty-two years, 22) <Husraw Anōsag-ruwān, son of Kawād,>²⁴ for forty-seven years, seven months and seven days, 23) Hormizd, son of Husraw, for twelve years; 24) Husraw Abarwēz-Šāh, son of Hormizd, for thirty-seven years; 25) Kawād, son of Husraw, who is called Sērōy, for nine years, 26) Ardašīr, son of Kawād, for one year and

22 On the founder of the Ashkanian dynasty, see Christensen 1931: 152.

23 On the identification with Ohrmizd II, see Messina 1939: 64, n. 6. On the identification with Ardašīr II, see Agostini 2013: 72, n. 586.

24 Both Pāzand and Pārsi manuscripts omit the name of this king which is likely Husraw I.

five months, 27) Yazdegard, son of Šāhryār, for twenty years old.

28) From then on they will fall apart and annihilate each other. Then the Arabs, with parted hair and of the stock of Xēšm, will arrive <and> with little force and troops they will seize Erānšahr for three hundred and eighty-two years, nine months, seven days, and four hours.”

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Jeffrey Kotyk

INFORMATION ON THE PERSIAN CALENDAR
IN THE *WEI SHU* 魏書 OF 554

The *Wei shu* 魏書 (*Book of Wei*) is an important dynastic history of China that was compiled in 554 by Wei Shou 魏收 (506–572). The compilers of these histories generally included information about foreign states and their customs, commodities, climates and other features, although these were secondary topics in practice, since the primary focus was on the history of the Chinese state and its rulers and bureaucratic leadership. These and other accounts of foreign polities, particularly those preserved in Chinese Buddhist works, constitute datable testimonies about a variety of cultures about which the Chinese knew.¹

This study will focus on the brief lines in the *Wei shu* regarding the Persian calendar, which has in the past been observed and discussed.² Although there are only a few details provided, these nevertheless are a valuable third-party testimony about the Sasanian calendar. My purpose here, as I will demonstrate below, is to demonstrate that gainful comparisons can be drawn between what we read in the Chinese account and the detailed discussion of the Persian calendar written by al-Bīrūnī (973–

1 The comparison of Chinese Buddhist and state accounts of foreign polities is an ongoing project. The utility of this approach, in which the wider body of classical Chinese literature is scanned and utilized, is demonstrated in Kotyk 2020b.

2 Compareti and Cristoforetti (2007: 63–71) list this data along with later sources which describe Iranian calendar conventions. The material from the *Wei shu* was reproduced in later Chinese histories.

1048).³ This exercise will show that Chinese histories can provide new information regarding Sasanian civilization, much in the same way that scholars utilize, for example, Arabic and Byzantine accounts of medieval Iran.

Historical Background

China's first probable exposure to foreign astronomy commenced from the early beginnings of Buddhism in China. The monk Sengyou 僧祐 (445–518) in his *Chu sanzang jiji* 出三藏記集 (*Compilation of Notes on the Tripitaka*) compiled biographies of monks from abroad who introduced Buddhism to China. One of these figures was An Shigao 安世高 during the second century CE. He was a prince of Parthia, who was said to have been “proficient in all foreign scriptures [including those related to] the forms of the seven planets and five elements, as well as divination related to wind sounds and clouds. He calculated the lunar phases, and entirely understood those changes.”⁴ Foreign astronomy, however, had no discernible impact on Chinese systems of astronomy (and by extension celestial omenology) at this particular point in history.⁵

3 Caution must be exercised in this respect. François de Blois (1996: 39) notes that “while Bērūnī’s empirical description both of the Persian and of the other Iranian calendars, is unquestionably correct, his account of its history is a legend.”

4 T 2145, 55: 95a10–11. 外國典籍莫不該貫，七曜五行之象，風角雲物之占，推步盈縮悉窮其變。The five elements and wind divination are Chinese in origin. This is simply artistic license in my evaluation. In short, if we are to rely on this source, An Shigao understood divination and metaphysics, as well as astronomy.

5 Pankenier (2019: 182) observes that “Chinese official astrology remained unchanged, and Sasanian astrological history, especially Jupiter-Saturn conjunctions and their migration through the triplicities of the zodiac, had no discernible impact on Chinese

Chinese knowledge of Iranian calendars is more likely to have come through the exchanges of state envoys, rather than religious contacts, in light of the fact that reference to the Iranian calendar is found in a state source. There are a number of documented diplomatic contacts between the Sasanian and Chinese courts. The *Wei shu* records that during the Shengui 神龜 period (518–520) a Persian envoy presented a letter and gifts to the Chinese court. The Persian envoy communicated that “the Son of Heaven of the great country was born from heaven. We hope that the place from whence the Sun rises is always of the Son of Heaven of Han. The king of the country of Persia, Kawād, sends his myriad salutations.”⁶ This envoy was sent to China by Kawād I (r. 488–531).⁷

There were several other documented envoys from Persia sent to China. The *Wei shu* records envoys from Persia arriving in China in the years 455, 461, 466, 468, 507, 517, 518, 521, and 522.⁸ The impetus behind these contacts in some instances might have been related to the expansion of Sasanian territory. Kawād I, for exam-

astrological theory and practice at the Imperial Observatory.” The impact of foreign astronomy and astrology becomes apparent in China from the eighth century onward. See Kotyk 2020a for a recent relevant study that also deals with the Chinese Buddhist context. Indo-Iranian horoscopy was the foundation for Chinese horoscopy, which developed from around the year 800 CE. See Kotyk 2018.

6 *Wei shu* 102.2272. 大國天子，天之所生，願日出處常為漢中天子，波斯國王居和多千萬敬拜。

7 居和多 in Middle Chinese (Pulleyblank) is reconstructed as *kiə fwa ta*. Although these characters here are used to phonetically transcribe a foreign name, their individual semantic meanings (“abide-peace-plenty”) suggest a selective and respectful attitude toward the Persian king. Middle Chinese readings based on Pulleyblank’s work. See database in Wikitionary.org.

8 *Wei shu* 5.115, 120; 6.126, 128; 7a.142; 8.205; 9.225, 228, 232, 233.

ple, established Qōbādān in the present day Badakhšan province of Afghanistan, northeast of Kabul bordering China.⁹ This is located near the western side of the Tarim Basin, not so far from Khotan, which we know was a stop-over from Persian territories to China. The *Wei shu* records that an Iranian envoy *en route* to China was stopped in Khotan. This incident occurred between 465–471, the reign of Emperor Xianwen 獻文帝 (454–476).¹⁰

The “Persian Calendar” in the *Wei shu*

It was presumably within these exchanges between Persia and China that matters such as the economy, customs and even calendar of Persia were discussed. The Chinese remarks in the *Wei shu* about the Persian calendar read as follows:

[The Persians] commence their year from the sixth lunar month. They place particular importance on 7/7 and 12/1. On those days the commoners and superiors invite one another and organize festivities, which are extremely merry. Also, annually on 1/20, everyone offers sacrifices for their ancestral dead.¹¹

The Chinese author has here converted the Persian months into Chinese months, although these would have presumably been approximations. 1/20 therefore *approximately* corresponds to day twenty of Ābān, which in the

9 Badiyi (2021: 215) lists the cities established by the Sasanian kings.

10 *Wei shu* 102.2263.

11 *Wei shu* 102.2272. Here I have rendered the dates into month/day format. 以六月為歲首，尤重七月七日，十二月一日，其日人庶以上各相命召，設會作樂，以極歡娛。又每年正月二十日，各祭其先死者。

Persian calendar is the eighth month. The Persian year was similar to the Chinese year in some respects. De Blois explains that “the Persian year has exactly 365 days, distributed among twelve months of 30 days each plus five special monthless days.”¹² The latter more specifically are five extra days or *epagomenæ*.¹³ The Chinese year is also comprised of twelve months of thirty days each, but this results in 360 days, to which no such *epagomenæ* are added. The difference resulting from the synodic month (29.53 days) and tropical year (365.24 days) is made up through regular intercalary months. In any case, the similarities between the two models allowed for the Chinese to use their own model as a functional equivalent. Based on the fact that the first month of the year in the Persian model is said to correspond to the sixth lunar month of the Chinese system, the correspondences between the Persian and Chinese months can be presented as follows:

Persian Month ¹⁴	Chinese Lunar Month
1. Frawardīn	6
2. Ardwašīšt	7
3. Hordād	8 (Autumn Equinox)
4. Tir/Tištār	9
5. Amurdād	10
6. Šahrevar	11 (Winter Solstice)
7. Mihr	12
8. Ābān	1
9. Ādur	2 (Vernal Equinox)
10. Day	3
11. Wahman	4
12. Spandarmad	5 (Summer Solstice)

12 De Blois 1996: 39.

13 Panaino 2013: 959.

14 See table of Persian month names in different time periods in Panaino 2011: 160.

The Chinese account records that the Persians commence their year from what the Chinese would consider the sixth lunar month. The sixth lunar month approximately corresponds to July-August in the Gregorian calendar. This is highly significant in light of al-Bīrūnī's remarks on the Persian calendar, as follows:

They have adopted the time of the summer-solstice as the beginning of the year for this reason in particular, that the two solstitial-points are easier to be ascertained by the help of instruments and by observation than the equinoctial points, for the former are the beginning of the advance of the sun towards one of the two poles of the universe and of his turning away from the same pole. ... This day, I mean Naurôz, has receded from its original proper place, so that in our time it coincides with the sun's entering the sign of Aries, which is the beginning of spring.¹⁵

One could expect, based upon this explanation, that the Chinese record of the Persian calendar, which likely would date to either the late fifth or early sixth century, would state that the Persian year commences at the summer solstice. The summer solstice, however, does not fall in the sixth lunar month in the Chinese calendar.

The same *Wei shu* offers several fascicles of information on contemporary astronomy and calendrical science. In the section on calendrical science, we find a list of the twenty-four solar terms (*er shi si qi* 二十四氣). These are seasonal markers each comprised of fifteen days. The solstices and equinoxes, among other periods, are included therein. The timing of the solstices and equinoxes are given by the *Wei shu* as follows:

15 Sachau 1879: 201.

Solar Term	Chinese Lunar Month ¹⁶
Winter solstice (<i>dongzhi</i> 冬至)	11
Vernal equinox (<i>chun fen</i> 春分)	2
Summer solstice (<i>xia zhi</i> 夏至)	5
Autumn equinox (<i>qiu fen</i> 秋分)	8

As we can see from this, according to the Chinese model, the Persian year would have commenced in the lunar month *following* the summer solstice. Daffinà states that *nowrōz* (the Persian New Year) was first set in autumn, but later it came to coincide with the spring equinox, but the Chinese did not have any knowledge of this. Daffinà further points to the possibility, albeit difficult to substantiate, that the Zoroastrian community in China might have followed a different holiday calendar.¹⁷ We might alternatively suggest that the beginning of the Persian year, as described in the Chinese source, reflects a Sasanian calendar reform, explained by de Blois: “According to the back-projected Yazdgirdi calendar, 1 Āḍar coincides with the vernal equinox in the first decade of the sixth century, and this must be the approximate date of what we can now call the Sasanian calendar reform.”¹⁸ Panaino, however, points out that “al-Bīrūnī, in his later masterpiece, the *Qānūn al-Mas‘ūdī*, apparently corrected his previous statements (and this is the third main source) affirming that the last Sasanian intercalation was made during the kingdom of Pērōz (459-484), thus not in that of Yazdgird I.”¹⁹

16 *Wei shu* 107a.2666.

17 Daffinà 1983: 164.

18 De Blois 1996: 39.

19 Panaino 2010: 7. See also Panaino 2014: 12.

The second Chinese lunar month, into which the vernal equinox falls, indeed aligns with Ādur. This would add additional confidence to much later statements about the Persian calendar, such as those of Abu'l Ḥasan Kūšyār (c.971–1029), who stated that during the reign of Xosrow I (531–578), the Sun entered the zodiac sign Aries in the month of Ādur (the Sun's entry into the tropical zodiac sign of Aries aligns with the vernal equinox).²⁰ The Chinese source cannot shed additional light on when precisely the Sasanian calendrical reform occurred. Nevertheless, this reformed model can be confirmed via the Chinese source as an external witness sometime before 554. We might even speculate that the reason the Chinese court knew of the Persian calendar was because a Persian envoy informed them about their calendrical reform.

The months as they are aligned with the seasons as described in chapter 25 of the *Bundahišn* (circa tenth century) reflect a later model in which the beginning of the year was set (again) to the vernal equinox. The text reads, "From Midsummer, which is on the day of Xwar of the intercalary month of Tīr, to Midwinter, which is on the day of Wahram of the intercalary month of Day, the day decreases and the night increases." According to de Blois, these "intercalary months" (*wihēzagīg*) are not the ordinary Zoroastrian months, but rather they are "months whose position in the tropical year is fixed through intercalation."²¹ Since the summer solstice in this frame-

20 Panaino 2013: 963–964. Panaino 2014: 9.

21 Agostini and Thrope 2020: 127; de Blois 1996: 44. MacKenzie (1986: 90–92) defines *wihēz(ag)* as "movement, progression," while *wihēzagīg* means "movable; intercalary (year)." This appears to be tropical, rather than sidereal, in character. The Sanskrit designation for the tropical zodiac is semantically similar: *sāyana* ("movable"), in contrast to the fixed or sidereal (*nirayana*) zodiac. See Monier-Williams 1899: 1207, 553. Henning 2007: 219–220. Kotyk 2018: 160.

work falls in “intercalary Tīr,” the fourth month, then presumably the vernal equinox would fall in “intercalary Frawardīn,” the first month. In any case, this is clearly different from the Chinese source at hand, which positions the Persian New Year shortly after the summer solstice.

According to de Blois, the solar calendar organized by the Seljuq ruler Jalāl ad-Dīn Malik-Šāh in 1079 fixed the spring equinox as the beginning of the year. De Blois further notes, “Its one lasting effect for Iranian Muslims is that it detached the traditional New Year’s festival once and for all from the Zoroastrian calendar and fixed it permanently to the vernal equinox.”²² Hence, Nowruz is still aligned with the vernal equinox today.

Comparing the Account of the Persian Calendar and Non-Chinese Sources

On this point, we should also note an intriguing and relevant item from the art record. Grenet explains that “in about 660, and indeed not very far from Balkh, a king of Samarkand, Varkhuman, commissioned (or at least inspired) a cycle of paintings known in scholarly literature as the ‘Ambassadors’ Painting,’ on display in the Samarkand Museum. The main subject is the reception of delegations from various peoples of Asia at Nowruz (the Zoroastrian New Year).” One of the figures therein depicts the Chinese festival of dragon boats.²³ Grenet further explains “that this iconographic program was structured by a calendar synchronism that occurred in 660 and again (though not so perfectly) in 663: in those years the sixth day of Nowruz according to the Sogdian

22 See de Blois 1996: 47.

23 See comments on this image by Compareti and Cristoforetti 2007: 21–23.

calendar, the summer solstice, and the Chinese festival of the dragon boats all fell on the same day.”²⁴

Al-Bīrūnī explained that “there was no difference between them [the Sogdians] and the Persians regarding the beginning of the year and the beginnings of some of the months”²⁵ We can indeed infer from these points that Sogdians and more broadly the contemporary Iranian world understood how to convert their calendar to the Chinese model and vice-versa. This inference would additionally confirm an observation by Agostini, who explains that it is evident from the Iranian side that “China was well known during the Sasanian period.”²⁶

Returning to the *Wei shu*, it states that “on 1/20, everyone offers sacrifices for their ancestral dead.” The first Chinese lunar month would correspond to the Persian month of Ābān. Al-Bīrūnī describes sacrifices offered to the dead during the month of Ābān:

The last five days of this month, the first of which is Ashtādh, are called Farwardajân. During this time people put food in the halls of the dead and drink on the roofs of the houses, believing that the spirits of their dead during these days come out from the places of their reward or their punishment, that they go to the dishes laid out for them, imbibe their strength and suck their taste. They fumigate their houses with juniper that the dead may enjoy its smell. The spirits of the pious men dwell among their families, children, and relations, and occupy themselves with their affairs, although invisible to them.

The *Wei shu* does not explain any details about the sacrifice, or for how long it is carried out, but it is noteworthy that the Chinese explanation would allow for ten

24 Grenet 2018: 247–248.

25 Sachau 1879: 220.

26 Agostini 2019: 456, fn. 17.

days before the end of the month. This could relate to what al-Bīrūnī explains here:

Regarding these days there has been among Persians a controversy. According to some they are the last five days of the month Ābân, according to others they are the Andergâh, i.e., the five *Epagomenae* which are added between Ābân and Andergâh-Mâh. When the controversy and dispute increased, they adopted all (ten) days in order to establish the matter on a firm basis, as this is one of the chief institutes of their religion, and because they wished to be careful, since they were unable to ascertain the real facts of the case.²⁷

The dates of lunar 7/7 and 12/1 would fall in Ardwhišt and Mihr respectively. Al-Bīrūnī does not mention a festival in Ardwhišt which we might directly compare to the Chinese account, but he does mention a certain feast on the third day of the month. However, Amurdād and Šahrevar have feasts on the seventh days in each month respectively according to al-Bīrūnī. Chinese lunar month 10 corresponds to Amurdād. It is possible that *qi* 七 (seven) was a mistake for *shi* 十 (ten).²⁸ Al-Bīrūnī elsewhere mentions that in Mihr-Mâh “on the 1st of it, or Hurmuzd-Rôz, falls the Second Autumn, a feast for the common people, agreeably with what has been before mentioned.”²⁹ The Chinese account therefore seems to confirm the dates of some festivals mentioned by al-Bīrūnī, even though there was a difference of around five centuries between these sources.

27 Sachau 1879: 210. Boyce 1982.

28 Compareti and Cristoforetti (2007: 67) suggest an alternative explanation: “The average date for the 7th day of the 7th Chinese month is August 9-10th. The texts could be recording either the Yazdgardī Nawrūz or a popular Summer’s New Year.”

29 Sachau 1879: 206-207.

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Finally, although not directly connected to the calendar, the *Wei shu* also relates the following about the Persian king:

The king possesses more than ten separate small camps within the country, which are like the imperial villas of China. He annually travels to them starting in the fourth month, and then returns in the tenth month.³⁰

If we convert these lunar months to Persian months, it would mean that the king would go on tour starting in Wahman and then return in Amurdād (ranging from summer to autumn). This perhaps refers to royal summer retreats.

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Paolo Ognibene

RUSSIAN AND SOVIET STUDIES
ON ZOROASTER'S TIME AND HOMELAND

Russian orientalism has always paid considerable attention to Iranian studies regardless of the political-institutional scenario (Tsarist, Soviet and post-Soviet) in which it operated. Therefore, a precise interest in one of the most felt and debated problems of pre-Islamic Iranian studies could not be missing: the possible dating and place of preaching of Zoroaster. In this work we will consider some articles by three highly productive Russian-language scholars who are well-known both at home and internationally. In different moments of their lives and in different periods of the last century they addressed the question of Zoroaster's time and homeland. They used different approaches and came to different conclusions: this is not surprising since in the history of the studies there is no shared vision by Iranists around the world on these controversial issues both diachronically and synchronously.¹

We will consider a work of V.V. Struve, two by V.I. Abaev and one of I.V. P'jankov. These scholars had different backgrounds and specific interests, but they converge on this issue as a testimony to the importance it has played and has for the studies on pre-Islamic Iran.

1 See brief overview in: OGNIBENE 2021, 1-6.

V.V. Struve

Vasily Vasil'evič Struve (1889-1965), who was an orientalist, academic of sciences, author of over four hundred publications, and specialist in the ancient Near East, wrote almost all of his works in Russian.² In the field of Iranian studies, he particularly dealt with the Achaemenid period: very few of his works in this field of study have been translated or were written in Western languages.³ Among the themes most dealt with in this sector, an important role is played by the works on the relations of the Achaemenids with the nomadic populations,⁴ the insurrections after the takeover of Darius I⁵ and the religion of the Persians in the Achaemenid period.⁶ Here we will deal in particular with one of his works from 1948, “The Homeland of Zoroastrianism”⁷ in which, discussing the place where Zoroaster preached, the problem of the time the prophet lived is also touched upon. The approach to the problem of dating and the place where Zoroaster preached is that of a historian from the Ancient Near East.

Homeland. “Rodina zoroastrisma” (Родина зороастризма) by Struve was published not too long after the discovery and publication of the so-called *daiva* in-

2 A list of the main publications of V.V. Struve is available online at the following page: <http://www.orientalstudies.ru/rus/images/personalia/pdf/struwe.pdf>. The list of his publications on the VDI is available on the following page: <http://vdi.igh.ru/authors/8?locale=ru>. The complete list of his works can be found in: DM 1962, 7-24.

3 In English one can read: STRUVE 1960, 529-544, while STRUVE 1949, 323-338 has been translated in Italian.

4 STRUVE 1946, 231-250; STRUVE 1949a, 15-28.

5 STRUVE 1949b, 10-29; STRUVE 1954, 7-13.

6 STRUVE 1944, 128-140; STRUVE 1960, 529-544.

7 STRUVE 1948, 5-34.

scription (XPf). The inscription was found by Herzfeld in Persepolis, published in 1937 and again in 1938:⁸ Struve's article is from 1948, but it must be borne in mind that in the meantime there was Second World War. Struve opens his work by recalling that in recent decades the idea that the homeland of Zoroastrianism should be sought in the East had spread to Soviet Iranology:

In recent decades, Soviet historiography has established the point of view according to which the homeland of Zoroastrianism must be sought in the East, in Central Asia and denies the belonging of the first Achaemenid rulers to the religion of Zoroaster.⁹

However, he immediately points out that the discovery of XPf led many scholars to “overthrow” their position regarding the homeland of Zoroastrianism and especially on the question of the Zoroastrianism of the Achaemenid rulers:

Xerxes was considered a Zoroastrian not only by Herzfeld, who had discovered the inscription of the *dai-va*, and for some time considered Darius, Xerxes' father, a follower of Zoroaster, but also by a scholar like Schaefer who, until the publication of the inscription, had strongly denied the Zoroastrianism of the Achaemenids. Now Schaefer categorically stated “that one can no longer doubt the official recognition of the Zoroastrian religion under Xerxes”.¹⁰

8 HERZFELD 1938; HERZFELD 1937, 56-77.

9 STRUVE 1948, 5: «В последние десятилетия в советской историографии победила точка зрения, утверждающая родину зороастризма на Востоке, в Средней Азии и отрицающая приверженность первых ахеменидов религии Заратуштры».

10 Struve 1948, 6: «Зороастрийцем объявил Ксеркса не только Херцфельд, открывший надпись о дэвах и уже давно объявивший Дария, отца Ксеркса, верным учеником пророка».

Most of Struve's article is in fact dedicated to emphasizing all the elements that allow us to contest this last statement, also focusing on a precious suggestion by Nyberg:

It appears evident that the Achaemenids who did not expose the bodies of the dead, but enclosed them in sumptuous tombs, followed the same cult of the Persian people. The Achaemenids were therefore in contradiction with one of the most important points of the teaching of Zoroaster and there is no doubt that Nyberg was right when he put before the researchers who claimed that the Achaemenids were Zoroastrians the request to "explain in a convincing way the difference that exists between the Zoroastrian burials and those practiced by the Achaemenids"^{11,12}

The most interesting part of his work, however, is

Заратуштры, но и такой исследователь как иранист Шедер, отрицавший до издания надписи о дэвах со всей определенностью зороастризм ахеменидов. Теперь же Шедер категорически утверждает, что нельзя дольше сомневаться в официальном признании зороастрийской религии при Ксерксе».

11 NYBERG 1931, 17: «Enfin, si les Achéménides doivent être tenus pour zoroastriens, on est istamment prié de nous expliquer, *d'une façon satisfaisante*, la difference qui se trouve entre la sépulture zoroastrienne et celle pratiquée par les rois achéménides».

12 STRUVE 1948, 30: «Очевидно, и ахемениды, не оставившие своих мертвых под открытым небом, а дававшие им покоиться в их пышных гробницах, являлись адептами того же заупокойного культа, что и персидский народ. Тем самым ахемениды становились в резкое противоречие с одним из самых существенных моментов учения зороастризма, и несомненно был прав Нюберг, когда он ставил перед исследователями, утверждавшими зороастризм Дария, требование: "дать удовлетворительное объяснение различию, которое имеется налицо между погребением зороастрийским и погребением, практиковавшимся царями ахеменидами"».

the one in which the scholar tries to explain why the religion of the Achaemenid rulers does not align with Zoroastrianism:

On the basis of what has been said previously, i.e. the complete replacement of the figure of Zoroaster with that of Darius and Xerxes, the difference in the terminology of the inscriptions of the latter from that of the *Avesta*, the difference in the burials of the Achaemenians from what was foreseen from Zoroastrianism, we feel entitled to suppose that the religious conception of Darius I and his son Xerxes was not identical to the teaching of Zoroaster, despite many points common to the two systems. However, we must now explain the presence of common traits in the two religious conceptions: the veneration of Ahuramazdā and the whole circle of his divinities, the prohibition of the cult of the *daiva*, the common calendar and the proximity of the ritual. Evidently, they depend on the fact that the religion of the Achaemenids and that of Zoroaster have drawn elements from a source common to both. This source is to be found in the religion of ancient Armenia and Azerbaijan, where as early as the eighth century, according to the inscription of the Assyrian ruler Sargon II in 714 BC, the deity Baga-Mazda was venerated. The powerful state of Urartu was formed in the region of Armenia and Azerbaijan and the Medes were the heirs of the Urartian culture and many of their religious conceptions. The Median tribe of the Magi became, as happened to the Israelite tribe of Levi, the depositary of the religious thought of the Median people. They inherited some religious concepts of ancient peoples who had inhabited Urartu, Azerbaijan and other territories of the areas close to the Caspian Sea. Thus the tradition of the Magi of exposing the bodies of the dead to animals undoubtedly goes back to the type of burial of the ancient Caspians who lived along the southern coast of the Caspian Sea: "The Caspians after having starved the elderly over seventy years old transport them to desolate places and observe from afar: if the deceased was skinned by birds they considered him blessed, if by

ferocious animals or dogs they considered him at a lower level, if no animal approached they considered him unfortunate. The Magi, of course, softened the barbaric ruthlessness of the Caspians regarding their elders, but the burial, or rather the exposure to animals, was welcomed by them.¹³

13 STRUVE 1948, 31: «На основании всего сказанного выше – о полной замене личности Заратуштры личностью Дария и Ксеркса, о различии в терминологии надписей последних от терминологии Авесты, о различии способа захоронения ахеменидов, предписанного зороастризмом, – мы имеем право высказать положение, что религиозная концепция Дария I и его сына Ксеркса не была тождественна с учением Зороастра, несмотря на ряд моментов, которые являются общими и для той и для другой системы. Вместе с тем, нам надлежит теперь объяснить наличие данных общих моментов в той или другой религиозной концепции: почитание Ахурамазды и всего круга его божеств, запрет культа дэвов, общность календаря и близость ритуала. Они, очевидно, обусловлены тем обстоятельством, что и религия ахеменидов и религия Зороастра черпали из одного общего источника. Такой источник надо искать в религии древней Армении и Азербайджана, где уже в VIII в., согласно свидетельству надписи ассирийского царя Саргона II от 714 г. до н.э., почиталось божество Бага-Мазда. В области Армении, Азербайджана сложилось мощное Урартийское государство, и мидяне являлись наследниками культуры Урарту и многих его религиозных воззрений. Мидийское племя магов стало, подобно израильянскому племени Леви, носителем религиозной мысли мидийского народа. Они унаследовали некоторые религиозные воззрения древних народов, населявших Урарту и смежные с ними Азербайджан и другие Прикаспийские области. Так, обычай магов оставлять своих мертвых на растерзание животным восходит несомненно к способу погребения древних каспиев, живших на южном побережье Каспийского моря: “Каспии, убив голодом лиц старше семидесяти лет, выносят их в пустынные места, при этом издали наблюдают: если покойник будет стащен птицами с носилок, то его считают блаженным, если же зверьями или собаками, то его менее (почитают), если же никем, то его считают несчастным.” Маги, конечно, смягчили варварскую

From the point of view of the history of studies it is interesting to note that at a time when many scholars changed their minds about the Zoroastrianism of the Achaemenids, Struve as well as a part of Soviet Iranists (but not Abaev) remained firmly committed to the idea that the Achaemenid rulers were Mazdeans, but not Zoroastrians. Very interesting is the reference to funerary practices similar to the Zoroastrian ones among other populations of the Caspian area and to a possible Urartian influence also on the religious world of ancient Iran as well as on the title of sovereigns.¹⁴

Time. From the point of view of the history of studies, Struve's considerations relating to the dating of Zoroaster do not represent the most original part of his study, although they are indispensable in the organization and structure of "Rodina zorostrisma".

The contemporary, but elder of Herodotus (= Xanthus) informs in this fragment of his work on the history of Lydia that "from the transit of Xerxes to the time of Zoroaster, 6000 years had passed". This indication of Xanthus the Lydian echoes a note by a member of Plato's Academy, Eudoxus of Cnidus, preserved in Pliny the Elder, on the fact that Zoroaster would have lived 6000 years before Plato. Eudoxus of Cnidus could perhaps have received this

жестокость каспиев по отношению к своим старикам, но способ погребения – представление трупов на растерзание животным – был ими воспринят».

14 The possible Urartean influence on the titles of Achaemenid rulers has already been highlighted by Gherardo Gnoli in a work from the late 1980s: GNOLI 1989, 6: "It is very likely that the direct model of many expressions in the Achaemenian titles was not Neo-Babylonian or Assyrian, but Urartian (cf. FRYE 1964, 37; 1969, 144; GNOLI 1974, 24 [...]) This fits in well with a whole lot of correspondences between Urartian and Old Persian, in phraseology as well, that O. SZEMERÉNYI (1982, 325-343) has pointed out".

testimony from a disciple of Plato, of Chaldean origin. The latter in Babylon, where many Persians were present, could have received some news, although not always exact, about Zoroaster and the time in which he lived. In fact, the 6000-year date separating Plato from Zoroaster undoubtedly belongs to an imaginary chronology and to the teaching on the periods of the created world in Iran. The Swedish historian of the religions of Iran Nyberg draws a conclusion worthy of interest from the news of Eudoxus of Cnidus: “the determination of 6000 years of distance between Zoroaster and Plato means that Plato is seen as the new incarnation of Zoroaster: he is the apocalyptic savior with which the Aeon reaches its fulfilment and its conclusion”. Such a conclusion must also be drawn from the fragment attributed to Xanthus the Lydian on the 6000 years that passed between the transit of Xerxes and Zoroaster. It must be assumed that the Lydian historian Xanthus included the time of the life of Xerxes in the system of 3000-year world periods, which play such a characteristic role in the history of the universe created by the religious vision of Iran. In Greek historiography we already find in Theopompus (4th century) the mention of these 3000-year periods: “Theopompus says that according to the teaching of the Magi over the course of 3000 years they (= the principles of good and evil) fight each other and mutually destroy what they have done”. The 6000-year period mentioned by Xanthus the Lydian and Eudoxus of Cnidus is found in *Dēnkard* in reference to the narration of the life of Zoroaster. In one of the two versions on the time in which the prophet of Ahura Mazda appeared, which entered the great legend related to it in the seventh book of *Dēnkard*, it is said that Ohrmazd (Ahura Mazda) created the *fravaši*, the celestial essence of Zarathuštra, at the beginning of the second 3000-year period and it remained in heaven with the Aməša Spənta. At the end of this second period, that is, after 6000 years had passed since creation, Ohrmazd decided to send Zarathuštra to earth, and this happened at the beginning of the third 3000-year period, that is, at the time when Ahreman began to accumulate forces to destroy Ohrmazd’s creation. We find in this

legend, which is preserved in *Dēnkard*, the indication of the appearance of the Savior (*saošyant*) 6000 years after creation, when the world was attacked by evil. *Saošyant* was considered Plato by his Chaldean disciple, an opinion that the famous physician and astronomer Eudossus of Cnidus has preserved. The savior of the world who chased away evil in the form of revolts against the provisions of Ahura Mazdā also proclaimed himself Xerxes according to Xanthus the Lydian.¹⁵

15 STRUVE 1948, 12-14: «Старший современник Геродота сообщает в этом фрагменте своего труда по истории Лидии (Лидиака), что “до перехода Ксеркса (протекло) со времени Зороастра 6000 лет”. Данное указание Ксанфы Лидийца перекликается с одним из замечаний члена Академии Платона, Евдокса Книдского, сохранившимся у Плиния Старшего, о том, что Зороастр жил за 6000 лет до Платона. Данное сведение Евдокс Книдский мог получить у одного из учеников Платона, который по происхождению был халдеем. Последний мог в Вавилонии, где имелось налицо некоторое количество персов, получить кой-какие, правда, не всегда точные сведения о Зороастре и времени его жизни. Действительно, дата 6000 лет, отделяющих Платона от Зороастра, относится несомненно к мифической хронологии и учению о мировых периодах, созданному в Иране. Шведский историк религии Ирана Нюберг делает заслуживающий внимания вывод из только что приведенного сообщения Евдокса Книдского, что “определение времени жизни Зороастра за 6000 лет до Платона означает: Платон является вновь воплощенным Зороастром, он апокалиптический спаситель, с которым Эон достигает своего завершения и своего заключения”. Подобный же вывод следует сделать и из сообщения, приписываемого Ксанфу Лидийцу о том, что “до перехода Ксеркса (протекло) со времени Зороастра 6000 лет”. Надо полагать, что лидийский историк Ксанф этими словами включал время жизни Ксеркса в систему мировых периодов в 3000 лет, которые играют столь характерную роль в истории вселенной, созданной религиозным мировоззрением Ирана. В греческой историографии мы находим уже у Феопомпа (IV в.) упоминание об этих трехтысячелетних периодах: “Феопомп же говорит, что, по учению магов, в течение 3000 лет они (т.е. доброе и злое начала) борются и взаимно

V.I. Abaev

Vasilij Ivanovič Abaev [Abajty Vaso] (1900-2001), who was a linguist, profound connoisseur of the Iranian and Caucasian worlds, and author of over 200 works, was a specialist of the Scythian-Sarmatian and Alanian worlds, and also Ossetian language and culture.¹⁶ Most of his works were written in Russian, including the famous *Historical-Etymological Dictionary of the Ossetian language*¹⁷. We will deal here with two of his studies. The first “Scythian Way of Life and Zoroaster’s Reform” (Скифский быт и реформа Зороастра), dating back to

уничтожают дело друг друга”. 6000-летний период, упоминаемый и Ксанфом Лидийцем и Евдоксом Книдским, мы находим в Денкарте в связи с повествованием о жизни Заратуштры. В одной из двух версий о времени появления пророка Ахурамазды, которые вошли в большую легенду о нем в VII книге Денкарта, рассказывается о том, что Ормазд (Ахурамазда) создал “фравашы”, небесную прасущность Заратуштры, в начале второго трехтысячелетнего периода, и она пребывала на небе вместе с Амеша-Спента. В конце же этого второго периода, т.е. после того как протекло почти 6000 лет со времени мироздания, решил Ормазд послать Заратуштру на землю, что и случилось в начале третьего трехтысячелетнего периода, т.е. как-раз к тому времени, когда Ахриман стал прилагать усилия, чтобы погубить творение Ормазда. Мы находим в этой легенде, которую сохранил Денкарт, указание на появление “спасителя” (саошианта) через 6000 лет после мироздания, когда в мир начало вторгаться зло. Таким “саошиантом” был объявлен Платон его халдейским учеником, чье мнение сохранил нам знаменитый врач и астроном Евдокс из Книда. Таким же “спасителем мира” от вторгающегося в него зла в виде смут и восстаний против ставленника Ахурамазды объявил себе, согласно Ксанфу Лидийцу, и Ксеркс».

16 The list of publications by V.I. Abaev can be found in: VAB 2001, 297-328.

17 АБАЕВ 1958; АБАЕВ 1973; АБАЕВ 1979; АБАЕВ 1989; АБАЕВ 1995.

1956, appeared in *Archiv Orientalní*,¹⁸ the second “Zoroaster and the Scythians” (Зороастр и скифы) in *Acta Iranica*.¹⁹ Both were written in Russian and never translated, and have long been neglected, although many of the problems they pose are truly interesting and original. Abaev approaches the question of Zoroaster's time and homeland starting from linguistic considerations.

“Skifskij byt i reforma Zoroastra” is a complex article in which the author seems to support two positions that are difficult to reconcile. On the one hand, in fact, he suggests a possible descent of Zoroaster from the Scythians and on the other hand he shows that the Scythians were never touched by Zoroastrianism:

The family name of Zoroaster Spitama (M.Ir. *Spitamān*) has evidently been preserved, among the Iranian languages still spoken, only in Ossetian in the family name *Sidæmon*. In reference to this, the question arises of a possible Scythian origin of Zoroaster's clan». ²⁰
«The Scythians are the only Iranian people who have remained completely extraneous to Zoroastrianism.»²¹

Regarding the place where Zoroaster preached, Abaev supports the eastern hypothesis:

According to one version, Zoroaster's homeland was Ragha in north-western Iran not far from today's Tehran. However, the vast majority of the geographical referenc-

18 АВАЕВ 1956, 23-56.

19 АВАЕВ 1975, 1-12.

20 АВАЕВ 1956, 56: «Фамильное имя Зороастра *Spitama* (средне-иранское *Spitamān*) из живых иранских языков сохранилось, повидимому, только в осетинском, в фамильном имени *Sidæmon*. В связи с этим встает вопрос о возможности скифского происхождения рода Зороастра».

21 АВАЕВ 1956, 56: «Скифы – одни среди иранских племен – остались полностью чужды зороастризму».

es of the *Avesta* strongly refer to eastern Iran as the place of production of this monument of ancient Iranian culture. The same thing is true, as we will see below, for the historical setting of Zoroaster's activity. The belief in the eastern Iranian provenance of the *Avesta* core can be considered dominant in contemporary studies.²²

Regarding the date of Zoroaster, Abaev supports the low dating that sees Zoroaster active in the sixth century BC:

After fictional dates that placed Zoroaster thousands of years before our era, a more reasonable point of view has emerged that better fits with historical data, according to which Zoroaster lived and worked in the sixth century BC, that is, almost simultaneously with the other religious reformers of Asia, the Buddha and Confucius. The Zoroastrian tradition and, in full agreement with it, an author, the famous Khwarazmian scholar al-Bīrūnī, trace the activity of Zoroaster to 258 years before the Seleucid era, that is to 569-570 BC. So far, nothing has been found that invalidates this indication. For this reason, the date 570 BC remains the only one suitable for orienting oneself on the question of the time in which Zoroaster lived.²³

22 АВАЕВ 1956, 25: «По одной версии родиной Зороастра была местность Рага в северо-западном Иране недалеко от нынешнего Тегерана. Однако подавляющее большинство географических упоминаний Авесты решительно указывают на восточный Иран, как на родину этого памятника древнеиранской культуры. Об этом же говорит, как увидим ниже, историческая обстановка деятельности Зороастра. Убеждение в восточно-иранском происхождении основного ядра Авесты можно считать господствующим в современной науке».

23 АВАЕВ 1956, 24: «После увлечения фантастическими датировками, отодвигавшими время Зороастра на тысячелетия до н.э., возобладала более разумная и сообразная с историческими данными точка зрения, по которой Зороастр жил и действо-

Interestingly, unlike Struve, Abaev is convinced that the Achaemenids embraced the Zoroastrian religion:

After the publication of the Xerxes' inscription against the *daiva* there can no longer be any doubt that the Achaemenids accepted and supported the new religion. The fact that in their inscriptions they never remember Zoroaster is explained if we consider that in their absolutist vision they could not admit to glorifying any other personality except themselves.²⁴

Unlike the previous work, “Zoroastr i skify” was published in a period of better contacts with Eastern countries and in a more accessible series. The lack of attention to this really interesting work by Abaev is probably due to the choice to publish it in the Russian language: unfortunately, this made it inaccessible to some scholars. The basic idea is that the history of Zoroastrianism consists of four distinct periods, two by two attributable to different geographical areas:

вал в VI веке до н.э., то-есть примерно в одно время с другими религиозными реформаторами Азии, Буддой и Конфуцием. Зороастрийская традиция и, в полном согласии с нею, такой осведомленный автор как знаменитый хорезмийский ученый Бируни приурочивают выступление Зороастра к 258 году до селевкидской эры, т.е., к 569-570 г. до н.э. До сих пор не обнаружено ничего, что опорачивало бы это показание. Поэтому дата 570 г. до н.э. остается единственной, пригодной для ориентировки в вопросе о времени Зороастра.»

24 АВАЕВ 1956, 55: «После опубликования антидэвовской надписи Ксеркса уже не может быть сомнения, что Ахемениды приняли и поддержали новую религию. То, что они в своих надписях нигде не упоминают о Зороастре, объясняется тем, что в своем абсолютистском величии они не могли допустить прославления какой-либо человеческой личности кроме самих себя».

So, if we leave aside the shadowy period of Alexander and the first Arsacids, in the history of Zoroastrianism we outline four main periods: 1. The very ancient or “Zarathuštrian” period. 2. The Achaemenid period. 3. That of the Sakastan. 4. The Sassanian one. The first and third are located in Central Asia, the second and fourth in western Iran. The first and third are creative. The second and fourth dogmatic and clerical. In the first and third periods, the popular masses played an active role. On the contrary, state power and the priestly hierarchy played an active role in the second and fourth.²⁵

The problem of the date is touched upon only in passing, but it is evident that Abaev continues to support the low dating, as in his previous work. While noting that the Scythians in general remained alien to Zoroastrianism, Abaev does not renounce the idea that Zoroaster may have been of Scythian descent²⁶ and that Zoroastrianism

25 АВАЕВ 1975, 12: «Таким образом, если опустить теневое время Александра и первых Аршакидов, в истории зороастризма намечаются четыре знаменательных периода: 1. древнейший “заратуштровский”, 2. ахеменидский, 3. сакастански, 4. сасанидский. Первый и третий локализовались в Средней Азии, второй и четвертый – в западном Иране. Первый и третий были творческими. Второй и четвертый – догматическими и клерикальными. В первый и третий периоды активная роль принадлежала народным массам. Во второй и четвертый – государственной власти и высшему духовенству».

26 АВАЕВ 1975, 2: «Контекст в котором упоминается в Yasna 46 “туранец” Фриана, не оставляет сомнения, что Зороастр был тесно связан с его родом, возможно, сам принадлежал к нему. В пользу скифского происхождения Зороастра говорит и тот примечательный факт, что его патроним Spitama (пехл. Spitāmān) из живых иранских языков засвидетельствован только в осетинском, прямом потомке одного из скифо-сарматских наречий. По распространенному в Осетии преданию одним из родоначальников осетинского народа был Sidæmon. Это имя закономерно восходит к *Spitamāna (пехл. Spitāmān)».

was formed in Khwarazm close to and in contact with the Scythians: the displacement of part of this population towards Sīstān would have helped to shift the centre of Zoroastrianism in that region.

I.V. P'jankov

Perhaps the most interesting work about Zoroaster's time and homeland was published only after the collapse of the Soviet Union by I.V. P'jankov in *Vestnik drevnej istorii*.²⁷ This text, although written in Russian, had a greater circulation and attracted the attention of various Western scholars, including Gherardo Gnoli.²⁸ P'jankov's work considers both the place where Zoroaster preached and the time. The first problem occupies the initial part of the article (up to page 16), the second the concluding part. While Struve addressed the problem as a historian of the Ancient Near East and Abaev as an expert on Outer Iran, P'jankov approaches the question from the point of view of an Iranist with a strong background in the field of classical philology.

Homeland. P'jankov points out that the lack of agreement on Zoroaster's homeland reflects the state of the sources and their possible interpretation:

The problems of place, time and social content of Zoroaster's activity have a long and complicated history in studies. Scholars of the past century and the beginning of ours, in general, followed the indications of the sources for these problems, without great cunning. In reality, since the same indications and the interpretation of these indications were not characterized by uniformity and concordance, even the positions of the scholars were far

27 P'JANKOV 1996, 3-23.

28 Gnoli asked me to translate the text into Italian in 1997.



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from being identical. But all the various opinions can be grouped according to two fundamental points of view: the first sees the origin of Zoroastrianism from the east of the Iranian world, the second prefers to see its origin in the west. The first, based on the most ancient and stable tradition, partly illuminated by the authority of the Iranian epos, considered the court of the *kavi* Vištāspa in Balkh to be the preaching site of the prophet Zoroaster, while the homeland of the prophet was seen somewhere north of the latter, in the plains of upper Zarafšan and Syr Darya.²⁹

He examines in detail all the solutions proposed by the scholars, listing respectively the strengths and weaknesses and adds:

the question of Zoroaster's place of life cannot have a simple and univocal solution: we must talk about the places of pilgrimage of the prophet and to determine them there are two points of support: the birthplace of the prophet and the place of his recognition, which, according to tradition, are quite distant from each other.³⁰

29 Р'ЯНКОВ 1996, 3: «Проблемы места, времени и социального содержания деятельности Зороастра имеют долгую и сложную историю в науке. Ученые прошлого века и начала нашего обычно бесхитросно следовали в этих вопросах указаниям источников. Правда, поскольку и сами указания, и истолкование этих указаний не отличаются единообразием и единодушием, то и позиции ученых были далеко не одинаковы. Но все многообразие мнений можно сгруппировать по двум основным точкам зрения: одна уверена в происхождении зороастризма на востоке Иранского мира, другая предпочитает видеть его родину на западе. Первые, опираясь на наиболее древнюю и устойчивую традицию, освещенную, в частности, и авторитетом иранского эпоса, считали местом проповеди пророка Зороастра двор *кави* Виштаспы в Балхе, а родину самого пророка видели где-то к северу от него, в долинах Верхнего Зеравшана и Сырдарьи».

30 Р'ЯНКОВ 1996, 10: «Поэтому вопрос о месте жизни Зороастра не может иметь простого и однозначного решения:



The wanderings of Zoroaster seem to unite two of these extreme points – the homeland of the prophet and the place of his recognition, that is, according to the determination presented above, the region of Samarkand and that of Balkh. And it must be said that the geography of the wanderings fully agrees with this determination. The whole period of Zoroaster's wanderings is divided into a series of stages. At the age of thirty, Zoroaster goes to a crowded meeting in the region of the four streams of the Dāityā River, where he obtains the first divine revelation in a colloquy with Ohrmazd and the Aməša Spənta. Later in the following ten years he continues in different places to have divine revelations in six colloquies with each of the Aməša Spənta, moreover in the first two years he tries to convert to the new faith various powerful characters in whose possessions he arrives. Finally, crossing the river Dāityā (Vaṛuhi-Dāityā), he arrives at the king Guštāsp (the *kavi* Vištāspa) and after two years, at the age of forty-two, he converts the king to his religion.³¹

приходится говорить о местах странствий пророка, а для их определения опорными являются два пункта: место рождения пророка и место признания его, которые, согласно традиции, достаточно удалены одно от другого».

31 Р'ЯНКОВ 1996, 11-12: «Странствия Зороастра как бы соединяют два этих крайних пункта – родину пророка и место его признания, т.е., согласно данному выше определению, область Самарканда и область Балха. И, надо сказать, география странствий вполне согласуется с таким определением. Весь период странствий Зороастра делится на ряд этапов. В возрасте 30 лет Зороастр отправился на многолюдный праздник в области четырех потоков реки Дати, где получает первое божественное откровение в беседе с Ормаздом и Амшаспандами. Затем в течение следующих 10 лет он продолжает в разных местностях получать божественное откровение в шести беседах с каждым из Амшаспандов, причем первые два года пытается обратить в новую веру разных могущественных лиц, во владения которых приходит. Наконец, минув ту же реку Дати (Вангхви-Датью), является к царю Гуштаспу (кави Виштаспе) и через два года, в возрасте сорока двух лет, обращает царя в свою религию».

Time. Also, for the problem of time, P'jankov examines with extreme attention all the hypotheses in the field, subjecting them to criticism:

The problem of Zoroaster's time is as complex as that of his homeland. We have already seen from the general overview of contemporaries' conceptions of Zoroaster as a historical figure that the variety of opinions is quite wide. Now the view prevails according to which the time of Zoroaster's life would have been approximately between the end of the second and the beginning of the first millennium BC, a little later or a little earlier. M. Boyce, supporter of an older dating (second half of the second millennium BC), bases themselves on the fact that there is a surprising closeness between the *Gāthā* and the *Rgveda*, both in language and in content. But it is not at all necessary to consider this synchronic closeness, due to direct contacts of the ancestors of the Iranian and Indian Aryans in their original homeland. The contacts between the "Avestan" Aryans and the Indians could have continued much later on the territory of eastern Iran. G. Gnoli bases his dating (end of the 2nd – beginning of the 1st millennium BC) on the fact that the difference between the historical environment of Zoroaster and the first Persian empire is too great: a substantial time interval must separate them. But the historical environments that he confronts are not two stages in the development of the same society, but moments of two independent lines of development of two different ethnoses.³²

32 P'JANKOV 1996, 16: «Проблема времени Зороастра столь же сложна, как и проблема места. Мы уже видели по общему обзору современных представлений о Зороастре как исторической личности, что разброс мнений здесь очень велик. Сейчас преобладает точка зрения, согласно которой время жизни Зороастра – рубеж II и I тыс. до н.э., немного позже или раньше. М. Бойс, сторонница наиболее ранней даты (вторая половина II тыс. до н.э.), аргументирует ее фактом поразительной близости Гат и Ригведы по языку и содержанию. Но такую близость вовсе не обязательно считать синхронной непосредственным контактам

P'jankov points out, however, that there is an internal Zoroastrian tradition with fairly defined dates which cannot be ignored:

The Zoroastrian tradition contains concrete indications on the period of the prophet's life. The most detailed information in this regard is preserved in the *Book of Ardā Virāz* (I, 1-4; Cfr. XXIII, 12): the religion that Zoroaster spread remained pure for three hundred years, until Alexander arrived, who killed the king of Iran and destroyed the capital of his kingdom. Alongside the number 300 in the Zoroastrian tradition, the number 258 years also appears with the same meaning. Its character derived from the first is evident: $300 - 42$ (the age of the prophet when the *kavi* Vištāspa was converted to his religion) = 258. Evidently, the latter figure became widely used in the post-Sassanid period, when the chronological scheme was created according to which with the conversion of the *kavi* Vištāspa the new period of one thousand years of Iranian history began (*Bd.* XXXIV, 1-9). This figure appears later among scholars of the Muslim period such as al-Bīrūnī, al-Mas'ūdī and others. Although the figure 300 calls for some doubts in its accuracy for rounding, it cannot be explained by any mythological speculation and the fact that it is artificial so far has not been proven. The latest attempt in this direction undertaken by A.Sh. Shahbazi, who believes that the Zoroastrians took the date of the fall of Babylon (539 BC) as the date of the "coming of religion" and thus

предков иранских и индийских арьев на их прародине. К тому же контакты между "авестийскими" и индийскими арьями могли продолжаться и много позднее на территории Восточного Ирана. Г. Ньюли обосновывает свою датировку (конец II – начало I тыс. до н.э.) тем, что различие между исторической средой Зороастра и ранней Персидской империей слишком уж велико: их должен разделять значительный промежуток времени. Но сравниваемые им социумы – не два этапа развития одного и того же общества, а моменты двух независимых линий развития двух разных этносов».

(539 – 311 + 30 = 258), suffers from a number of obvious strains. Among other things, the meaning of the figure is clear: 300 years are 10 generations each of 30 years; precisely this calculation of time was accepted in the Zoroastrian tradition. Calculation based on generations is a widespread habit; in Central Asia it was preserved until the new era (on a 25-year basis) and is particularly precise in the narratives of events dating back two to three hundred years. The end of the 300-year period falls, as tradition clearly shows, in the year of the perishing of the last Achaemenid and its capital Persepolis, i.e. 330 BC. Evidently, at the beginning the calculations were made starting from this date. Thus, the Syriac writer Theodore Bar Konai, taking from Theodore of Mopsuesta (IV-V century AD), who knew the legends of the “Persian magi” well, gives the following date for Zoroaster: 628 years and 7 months before the birth of Christ. Later the figure 300/258 was calculated from the beginning of the Seleucid era (312 BC) and spread widely in the Hellenized East. By the time the Zoroastrian chronology was still united with it, its true origin was already forgotten and was only linked to Alexander. The data of the authors of the Muslim period show that their determinations of the time of Zoroaster are equally based on the calculation from the beginning of the Seleucid era. But to determine the absolute real data of the prophet’s life these calculations, of course, make no sense. Furthermore, in creating the remembered chronological scheme of the Sassanid period, its compilers committed a voluntary alteration: in order to shorten, as much as possible, the time interval between their epoch and the time of action of the prophet, they made identical the beginning of the Seleucid era with the date of conversion of the *kavi* Vištāspa, and their contemporaries and subsequent generations were aware of this alteration. This naturally distanced their chronology even further from the absolute real data, although the end of the 258-year period, as previously, coincided with the passage of power from Darius Codomannus to Alexander. And therefore, the period of 300 years must be counted in the depth of

time since the destruction of Persepolis and the killing of the last Darius, that is, from 330 BC. What event had served as the basis for the start of this period? As can be seen from the diagram recalled, where the figure 258 (300 - 42) appears, its compilers considered this event to be the birth of the prophet. However, even in this case, it is evident that the attempt to decrease the time interval had an impact. As the quotation from the *Book of Ardā Virāz* shows, the ancient tradition started this period from the first divine Revelation of Zoroaster, and in reality, judging from a series of data, it was precisely from that moment that the time was taken into account in the first Zoroastrian community. If we transfer all these indications into today's system of calculating the years, we can obtain the following table of dates (the years indicated are BC): 660 – birth of Zoroaster, 630 – Revelation, 618 – conversion of the *kavi* Vištāspa, 583 – death of Zoroaster. And it is precisely in this way that E. W. West dated the life of Zoroaster, and after him, A. V. Jackson and some other scholars, although they based themselves on other calculations. This dating, as we will show below, corresponds best of all to the real historical situation and very successfully introduces the life of the prophet into the world chronology system and shows very interesting synchronisms. In addition to the Zoroastrian legend examined on – the 300-year time interval between Zoroaster and Alexander – in Iran there was still an evidently independent tradition about the time of Zoroaster. It can be judged on the basis of the information of medieval Muslim authors on the cypresses planted by Guštāsp, in celebration of the new adopted religion, in various places in Khorasan. That is, the age of these cypresses when they perished. Different figures are indicated, the departure dates are not entirely clear, the possible calculations could be based on the solar and lunar calendar: consequently, different dates are obtained for the conversion of Guštāsp, but all fall within an interval between 604 and 548 BC.³³

33 P'JANKOV 1996, 16-18: «Зороастрийская традиция со-

P'jankov takes also into consideration the Pytha-

держит вполне определенные указания на время жизни пророка. Наиболее развернутые сведения на этот счет сохранились в “Книге Арда-Вираза” (I, 1-4; ср. XXIII, 12): религия, которую распространял Зороастр, сохранилась в чистоте в течение трехсот лет, пока не пришел Александр, убивший правителя Ирана и разрушивший его столицу и царство. Наряду с цифрой 300 в зороастрийской традиции фигурирует в том же значении и другая – 258 лет. Производный ее характер от первой очевиден: $300 - 42$ (возраст пророка, когда был обращен в его религию кави Виштаспа) = 258. По-видимому, эта последняя цифра вошла в широкий обиход в позднесасанидское время, когда была создана хронологическая схема, согласно которой обращение кави Выстаспы начинало собой новый тысячелетний период иранской истории (Vd. XXXIV, 1-9). Именно эта цифра фигурирует позднее у ученых мусульманского времени – Бируни, Масуди и др. Цифра 300, хотя и вызывает некоторые сомнения в своей точности из-за округленности, не может быть объяснена никакими мифологическими спекуляциями, и искусственность ее так до сих пор и не доказана. Последняя попытка в этом направлении, предпринятая А.Ш. Шахбази, который считает, что зороастрийцы по недоразумению приняли дату падения Вавилона (539 г. до н.э.) за дату “прихода религии” (откуда: $539 - 311 + 30 = 258$), страдает множеством очевидных натяжек. Между тем смысл цифры ясен: 300 лет – это 10 поколений по 30 лет каждое; именно такой счет времени был принят в зороастрийской традиции. Счет по поколениям – вообще широко принятый обычай; в Средней Азии он сохранялся вплоть до нового времени (по 25 лет) и как раз в преданиях о событиях двух-, трехсотлетней давности является довольно точным. Конец 300-летнего периода приходится, как ясно указывает традиция, на гибель последнего царя-Ахеменида и его столицы Персеполя, т.е. на 330 г. до н.э. По-видимому, сначала от этой даты и производились расчеты. Так, сирийский автор Феодор бар Конаи, заимствовавший у Феодора Мопсуестийского (IV-V вв. н.э.), хорошо знавшего предания персидских магов, дает следующую дату для Зороастра: 628 лет и 7 месяцев перед рождением Христа. Позднее цифру 300/258 отсчитывали от начала селевкидской эры (312 г. до н.э.), широко распространившейся по эллинистическому Востоку. К тому времени, когда с ней



gorean tradition:

была соединена зороастрийская хронология, ее истинное происхождение уже было забыто, и она связывалась только с Александром. Как показывают данные авторов мусульманского времени, их определения времени Зороастра тоже основаны на отсчете от начала селевкидской эры. Но для установления реальных абсолютных дат жизни пророка эти расчеты, конечно, значения не имеют. Более того, при создании упомянутой хронологической схемы сасанидского времени ее составители допустили сознательное искажение: чтобы как можно больше сократить временной промежуток между своей эпохой и временем деятельности пророка, они отождествили начало селевкидской эры с датой обращения кави Виштаспы, и об этом искажении знали их современники и последующие поколения. Это, конечно, еще значительно отдалило их хронологию от реальных абсолютных дат, хотя конец 258-летнего периода у них по-прежнему означал переход власти от царя Дарай-Дарайяна к Александру. Итак, 300-летний период нужно отсчитывать в глубь времени от разрушения Персеполя и гибели последнего Дария, т.е. от 330 г. до н.э. Какое же событие послужило началом этого периода? Как видно из упомянутой схемы, где фигурирует цифра 258 (300-42), ее составители считали таким событием рождение пророка. Однако и в данном случае, видимо, сказалось стремление уменьшить временной интервал. Как показывает приведенная выше цитата из “Книги Арда-Вирази”, древняя традиция начинала этот период от первого божественного Откровения, полученного Зороастром, и действительно, судя по ряду данных, именно от него и велся счет времени в первоначальной зороастрийской общине. Если перевести все эти указания на современную систему летосчисления, то можно получить следующую таблицу дат (годы до н.э.): 660 – рождение Зороастра, 630 – Откровение, 618 – обращение кави Виштаспы, 583 – гибель Зороастра. Именно так и датировал жизнь Зороастра Э.В. Вест, а вслед за ним А.В. Джексон и некоторые другие ученые, хотя они и основывались на иных расчетах. Такая датировка, как будет показано ниже, лучше всего соответствует реальной хронологии, выявляя весьма интересные синхронизмы. Кроме рассмотренного зороастрийского предания о 300-летнем промежутке времени между Зороастром и Александром в Иране



The data of the Pythagorean tradition on the time of Zoroaster are based on an independent source. According to Aristoxenus, a disciple of Aristotle, Pythagoras listened to the Chaldean Zarat, evidently when this Greek sage was in Babylon after Cambyses took Egypt (525 BC). The name Zarat (Ζαράτας) is believed to be the Aramaic form of the name Zoroaster. P. Kingsley, basing himself on the data of Aristoxenus, calculated that the moment of greatest activity of Zoroaster in the Pythagorean tradition occurred around 570 BC. This researcher is undoubtedly right, believing that the “Chaldean” Zoroaster as teacher of Pythagoras is an invention, but perhaps it was not correct to believe that the indicated figure had no real foundation. Probably the most ancient information on the Iranian prophet, which reached the Greeks through Aramaic intermediation, was concentrated in it. And it is indicative that the Zarat of the Pythagoreans, as well as the cypresses of Guštāsp of the later Iranian tradition, mentioned above, are related to the same time – the end of the 7th – the beginning of the 6th century BC.³⁴

жила еще, по-видимому, и независимая традиция о времени Зороастра. Судить о ней можно по сообщениям средневековых мусульманских авторов о кипарисах в разных местах Хорасана, посаженных будто бы Гуштаспом в ознаменование принятия им новой религии. Речь идет о возрасте этих кипарисов к моменту их гибели. Указываются разные цифры, не вполне ясны исходные даты, расчеты возможны и по солнечному календарю, и по лунному, в итоге получаются разные даты обращения Гуштаспа, но все они укладываются в рамки между 604 и 548 годами до н.э.).

34 P'JANKOV 1996, 18: «К самостоятельному источнику восходят данные пифагорической традиции о времени Зороастра. Согласно Аристоксену, ученику Аристотеля, Пифагор слушал халдея Зарата, видимо, тогда, когда этот греческий мудрец попал в Вавилон после захвата Египта Камбизом (525 г. до н.э.). Считается, что имя “Зарат” (Ζαράτας) – арамейская форма имени “Зороастр”. П. Кингсли, основываясь на данных Аристоксена, рассчитал, что акме Зороастра в пифагорейской традиции приходится примерно на 570 г. до н.э. Этот исследователь, несомнен-

Finally, he considers the Platonic tradition:

A completely different impression on the time of Zoroaster can be obtained by turning to the Platonic tradition, which places the prophet 6000 years before this time. The supporters of an ancient dating of Zoroaster generally refer to this figure, interpreting it in the sense that, already for Plato's contemporaries, Zoroaster was a character of an indeterminate and fantastically remote antiquity. But this impression is deceptive. To understand it, it is necessary to put in order the news of the Platonic school on Zoroaster. The assertions of Zoroaster's 6000 years of antiquity are already present in the direct disciples of Plato, in the works of Eudoxus and Aristotle. A variant of this figure, a simple adaptation to traditional Greek chronology, is the date referring to 5000 years before the Trojan War: this date has been given by Hermippus and Hermodorus and many other authors after them. Plato's successors recognized the moment of Plato's life as the starting point for the 6000-year date. It is rightly believed that this idea arose in circles close to the philosopher, among his disciples, who knew the Zoroastrian tradition and saw in Plato a reincarnation of Zoroaster. It must be said that the Platonists had also connected to Zoroaster or directly identified with him other people who had lived at the same time with the founder of their school or a little earlier: one of them was an inhabitant of Pamphilia, known in the Platonic tradition, as a certain Er or a certain Cronius; Er was considered the grandson of the famous wizard Ostanes

но, прав, признавая халдейского Зороастра – учителя Пифагора фикцией, но вряд ли правильно было бы считать, что указанная фигура не имеет под собой вообще никакой реальной основы. Скорее всего в ней воплотились наиболее ранние сведения об иранском пророке, дошедшие до греков через арамейское посредство. И показательно, что “Зарат” пифагорейцев, как и кипарисы Гуштаспа поздней иранской традиции, о которых шла речь выше, приурочены к одному и тому же времени – концу VII – VI в. до н.э.».

(about 480 BC). Thus Zoroaster, who had lived 6000 years earlier, appeared to have a “double” in the period close to Plato. A little light on the provenance of such an original idea about the time of Zoroaster can be found in the oldest mention of ancient literature, belonging to Xanthus, about Zoroaster as the founder of magic. In a brief quotation of Xanthus in Diogenes Laertius (*proem.* 2), it is said that Zoroaster lived 6000 years before the coming of Xerxes against Greece, and immediately after this, that the magician Ostanès is his closest successor. It is clear that there is some gap in the quotation that distorts the original meaning of Xanthus’s sentence. In Pliny’s account of the Magi (*NH.* XXX, 3-8), which evidently refers to the same passage as Xanthus, but through the re-elaboration of an entire series of intermediaries (including Hermippus?), one can read about Zoroaster, who lived 6000 years before Plato or 5000 years before the Trojan War, and about an “other Zoroaster” from Proconnesus, which should be placed not long before Ostanès, who accompanied Xerxes at the time of his expedition against Greece. It is clear that in Xanthus there were two “Zoroasters”, the ancient one and another who lived 6000 years after the first and was obviously considered the master of Ostanès, well known in Hellas as the first person who brought the teaching of the Magi and as tutor of Democritus and Protagoras. Later some of the intermediaries (perhaps Heraclides Ponticus) identified the second Zoroaster, as was customary in the ancient literary tradition, with one of the Greek sages, this time, evidently, with Aristeas of Proconnesus. The dating of the latter with the culmination of his activity at the time of “Croesus and Cyrus”, that is, approximately to the fall of Sardis (around 545 BC), fully responds to this identification. The link between Zoroaster’s 6000-year-old thesis and Ancient-Iranian conceptions of 3000-year cycles has long been recognized. This same thesis reflects a misunderstanding of the Zoroastrian teaching that the *fravaši* of Zoroaster, his spiritual essence, was created at the beginning of the second 3000-year cycle, while the prophet was physically born at the end of the third cy-

cle, and exactly 6000 years after his spiritual creation he obtained the Revelation. This teaching is very old and is likely to be of the prophet himself. As we have seen, the ancient information about a 6000 year old Zoroaster has preserved the idea of “another Zoroaster”, a real earthly prophet, placing him in a historical time close to the authors of this information. Expecting that a particular chronological accuracy of this information is obviously unthinkable, the oldest one, as it seems, placed the “second Zoroaster” in the pre-Achaemenid period (see also Ctesias’s idea of Zoroaster as ancient King of Bactria).³⁵

35 P’JANKOV 1996, 18-19: «Совсем иное впечатление о времени Зороастра складывается при ознакомлении с платоновской традицией, которая помещала пророка за 6000 лет до своего времени. На эту цифру обычно и ссылаются сторонники ранней датировки Зороастра, толкуя ее в том смысле, что будто бы уже для современников Платона Зороастр был персонажем неопределенной, фантастически глубокой древности. Но такое впечатление обманчиво. Для того чтобы понять это, необходимо разобраться в сведениях платоновской школы о Зороастре. Утверждения о 6000-летней древности Зороастра содержались уже у непосредственных учеников Платона – в сочинениях Эвдокса и Аристотеля. Вариантом такой же цифры, лишь приспособленной к традиционной греческой хронологии, являлась дата 5000 лет до Троянской войны, такую дату давали Гермипп, Гермодор, а вслед за ними и многие другие авторы. Точкой отсчета для даты 6000 лет последователи Платона признавали время жизни самого Платона. Справедливо полагают, что такое представление возникло в ближайшем окружении философа, среди его учеников, знакомых с зороастрийской традицией и видевших в Платоне новое воплощение Зороастра. Надо сказать, что платонники ставили в связь с Зороастром или прямо отождествляли с ним и других лиц, живших одновременно с основателем их школы или несколько ранее: одним из них был некий памфилиец, популярный в платоновской традиции, то ли Эр, то ли Кроний; Эр считался внуком знаменитого мага Остана (ок. 480 г. до н. э.). Таким образом, Зороастр, живший 6000 лет назад, оказывается, имел двойника в близкое к Платону время. Некоторый свет на происхождение такого своеобразного

Final Remarks. As we can see, the three scholars used dif-

представления о времени Зороастра проливает древнейшее в античной литературе упоминание о Зороастре как основателе магии, принадлежащее Ксанфу. В краткой цитате из Ксанфа у Диогена Лаэртского (проет. 2) говорится о Зороастре, который жил за 6000 лет до похода Ксеркса в Грецию, и сразу же после этого – о маге Остане как его ближайшем преемнике. Ясно, что в цитате имеется какая-то лакуна, искажившая первоначальный смысл высказывания Ксанфа. В рассказе Плиния о магах (NH XXX, 3-8), восходящем, по-видимому, к тому же пасажу из Ксанфа, но через обработку целого ряда посредников (в том числе Гермиппа?), говорится о Зороастре, жившем за 6000 лет до Платона или за 5000 лет до Троянской войны, и о “другом Зороастре”, Проконнеском, которого помещают незадолго до Остана, сопровождавшего Ксеркса во время его похода в Грецию. Ясно, что у Ксанфа шла речь о двух Зороастрах – древнем и другом, который жил на 6000 лет позднее первого и считался, видимо, учителем Остана, широко известного в Элладе в качестве первого человека, принесшего сюда учение магов и в качестве воспитателя Демокрита и Протагора. Впоследствии кто-то из посредников (может быть, Гераклид Понтийский) отождествил второго Зороастра, как это было принято в античной литературной традиции, с одним из греческих мудрецов, на этот раз, видимо, с Аристеем Проконнесским. Та датировка последнего, которая приурочила его акме ко времени “Креза и Кира”, т.е. к падению Сард (ок. 545 г. до н.э.), вполне отвечала бы такому отождествлению. Связь тезиса о 6000-летней древности Зороастра с древнеиранскими представлениями о 3000-летних циклах установлена уже давно. Сам этот тезис явился отражением плохо понятого зороастрийского учения о том, что фраваша Зороастра, его духовная сущность, была создана в начале второго 3000-цикла, а физический пророк был рожден в конце третьего цикла и ровно 6000 лет после своего духовного сотворения получил Откровение. Учение это – очень древнее и, возможно, было создано уже самим пророком. Как мы видели, античные сообщения о Зороастре 6000-летней древности сохранили представление и о “другом Зороастре” – реальном земном пророке, помещая его в исторически близкое к авторам этих сообщений время. Особой хронологической точности от этих сообщений ждать, конечно, не приходится, но

ferent approaches to tackle the subject: in particular Struve and Abaev were concerned above all with the problem of Zoroaster's homeland and only marginally with the date, as if the second were a consequence of the first. On the other hand, P'jankov faced both problems and focused in particular on the dating of Zoroaster by examining all the hypotheses currently present, offering his own interpretation. The attention paid to these issues makes it clear that Russian Iranists dealing with the pre-Islamic period considered them a priority and felt the need to frame the proposed solutions within the history of studies.

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древнейшее из них, как кажется, помещало "другого Зороастра" в предахеменидское время (ср. также представление Ктесия о Зороастре как о древнем царе Бактрии)».

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