‘THE COALS WHICH WERE HIS GUARDIANS...’

THE HERMENEUTICS OF HERACLIUS’ PERSIAN CAMPAIGN AND A FAINT TRACE OF THE ‘LAST GREAT WAR’ IN ZOROASTRIAN LITERATURE*

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This article discusses the desecration of the Sasanian fire temple complex of Ādur Gušnasp (‘Fire of the Stallion’) at modern Takt-e Solaymān (‘Throne of Solomon’) in Iranian Azerbaijan (Atropatene) at the hands of Heraclius in 624 CE and the reception of this symbolically laden military-political event in Zoroastrian literature in ‘Book’ Pahlavi or literary Middle Persian. The article first presents the Greek and Armenian historical sources on the destruction of the shrine in 624 CE followed by a brief survey of the archaeological and material remains at Takt-e Solaymān. It then presents the Pahlavi literary sources on the mythical and theological importance of the Ādur Gušnasp and proceeds to argue that Zoroastrian hermeneutical literature reinterpreted the Old Avestan texts, namely the *Yasna Haptaŋhāiti* (*Yasna* 35–41), through complex forms of eisegesis, thus retro-reading a prophecy of the fire’s desecration at the hands of malevolent individuals back into their ancient scriptures from the 2nd millennium BCE. Ultimately, these fugitive passages not only serve to highlight the incomprehensible loss of this central icon of Sasanian imperial religion but they also suggest a rich world of lost Persian *responsa* to the ‘Last Great War’ of Late Antiquity.

It is my great privilege to contribute this article in honour of James Howard-Johnston and his significant contributions to the study of the Sasanian Empire (224–651 CE). His most recent book on the ‘Last Great War’ between the Romans and the Sasanians will surely serve as a touchstone for all future research and writing on the intertwined military and political history of the two great powers of Late Antiquity. As Howard-Johnston notes in his Preface:

> “There *is* evidence about the war, but it is fragmentary and scattered across different types of sources in different languages. It is a painstaking and time-consuming process to extract, vet and piece together the bits of information into some sort of coherent story.”[1]

* I am most grateful to Mary Whitby for kindly sharing her unpublished translation of George of Pisidia’s *Heraclias.* I would also like to thank Matthew P. Canepa for his comments on my paper and his generosity in sharing his photos from Takt-e Solaymān which are reproduced here with his permission. I must also thank Shervin Farridnejad, Sergey Minov and Daniel J. Sheffield for their always generous help with locating hard-to-

As any historian working on this three-decade-long war (*ca*. 603–630 CE), the longest sustained military engagement in Late Antiquity, Howard-Johnston has been compelled to draw upon a staggering range of sources in a number of languages spanning multiple scholarly disciplines and areas, and his steadfast commitment to recouping the voice and contextualising the motivations of Husraw II (r. 590–628 CE) and the Sasanians deserves the highest praise.[2]

Close readings of the panegyrics of George of Pisidia, the *Chronicon Paschale*, the *History* attributed to Sebeos, and a number of other historical sources in Greek, Syriac, and Armenian, have allowed Howard-Johnston as well as those on the Perso-Arabic side to write the compelling histories of this conflict that we now have at our disposal.[3] One gaping lacuna in our primary sources and, hence, in our secondary scholarship is, however, the conspicuous absence of any narrative sources in Middle Persian, be they literary or inscriptional, which

find bibliographic resources. Finally, I would like to acknowledge Phil Booth and Mary Whitby for their incisive comments and critiques which have substantially improved the readability of this paper. All sins of omission and commission remain mine however.

[1] J. HOWARD-JOHNSTON, *The Last Great War of Antiquity*, Oxford 2021, p. v. For structural comparisons of the two empires, see J. HOWARD-JOHNSTON, The Two Great Powers in Late Antiquity: A Comparison, in *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East*, vol. 3, *States, Resources, and Armies*, ed. by A. Cameron, Princeton 1995, pp. 157–226 and M. MORONY, Should Sasanian Iran be Included in Late Antiquity?, in *Sasanika Occasional Papers*, vol. 1, ed. by T. Daryaee, Beverly Hills 2010, pp. 1–9.

[2] See, for example, J. HOWARD-JOHNSTON, The Sasanians' Strategic Dilemma, in *Commutatio et Contentio: Studies in the Late Roman, Sasanian, and Early Islamic Near East in Memory of Zeev Rubin*, ed. by H. Börm & J. Wiesehöfer, Düsseldorf 2010, pp. 37–70, esp. pp. 58–68. For a survey of Sasanian historiography and the challenges of operating across disciplinary boundaries, see T. DARYAEE, The Limits of Sasanian History: Between Iranian, Islamic and Late Antique Studies, *Iranian Studies* 49/2, 2016, pp. 193–203.

[3] For a survey of the historians and chronicles, see J. HOWARD-JOHNSTON, *Witnesses to a World Crisis: Historians and Histories of the Middle East in the Seventh Century*, Oxford 2010. For an earlier but still valuable survey of Greek historical writing, see M. WHITBY, Greek Historical Writing after Procopius: Variety and Validity, in *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East*, vol. 1, *Problems in the Literary Source Material*, ed. by A. Cameron & L.I. Conrad, Princeton 1992, pp. 25–81. For the Perso-Arabic side, see Z. RUBIN, Ibn al-Muqaffa and the Account of Sasanian History in the Arabic Codex Sprenger 30, *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 30, 2005, pp. 52–93; P. POURSHARIATI, *Decline and Fall of the Sasanian Empire: The Sasanian-Parthian Confederacy and the Arab Conquest of Iran*, London 2008; T. DARYAEE, When the End is Near: Barbarized Armies and Barracks Kings of Late Antique Iran, in *Ancient and Middle Iranian Studies. Proceedings of the 6th European Conference of Iranian Studies, held in Vienna, 18–22 September 2007*, ed. by M. Macuch, D. Weber, & D. Durkin-Meisterernst, (Iranica 19), Wiesbaden 2010, pp. 43–52; J. WIESEHÖFER, The Late Sasanian Near East, in *The New Cambridge History of Islam,* Vol. 1, *The Formation of the Islamic World, Sixth to Eleventh Centuries*, ed. by Ch. Robinson, Cambridge 2010, pp. 98–152; and KH. REZAKHANI, The End of Sasanian Rule: The Center and Periphery of Ērānšahr in the Seventh Century, in *Studi sulla Persia Sasanide e suoi rapporti con la civilta attigue,* ed. by T. Daryaee & M. Compareti, Bologna 2019, pp. 229–55.

provide us with the *vox sassanorum*, so to speak, for this 'Last Great War.'[4] One of the most profound historiographical challenges facing military and political historians of the Sasanians or those writing on socio-cultural interactions between the imperial rivals,[5] is that we simply do not possess any significant Persian or imperial narrative sources—beyond numismatic and sigillographic evidence—for what the Sasanians were attempting to achieve from a military or political perspective.[6] Such a state of affairs leaves us with an unenviable historiographical task which may only be remedied by the discovery of new or lost source materials. Given the old adage that 'hope is not a strategy,' we must, nonetheless, attempt to redress this historiographical imbalance as best we can with the notoriously opaque and intransigent sources at hand.

To that end, in this article I will showcase some admittedly fugitive passages in 'Book' Pahlavi (literary Middle Persian) hermeneutical literature which appear to have been produced by the Zoroastrian priesthood in Late Antiquity in an attempt to respond theologically to the

[4] As noted in J. WIESEHÖFER, Rūm as Enemy of Iran, in *Cultural Borrowings and Ethnic Appropriations in Antiquity*, ed. by E.S. Gruen (Oriens et occidens 8), Stuttgart 2005, p. 116.

[5] For knowledge transfer and cultural exchange between the two powers, see U. HARTMANN, Wege des Wissens: Formen des Gedankenaustauschs und der kulturellen Beeinflussung zwischen dem spätantiken Rom und dem Sāsānidenreich, in *Getrennte Wege? Kommunikation, Raum, und Wahrnehmung in der Alten Welt,* ed. by R. Rollinger, A. Luther, & J. Wiesehöfer, Frankfurt am Main 2007, pp. 50–107.

[6] As noted in HOWARD-JOHNSTON, *Last Great War* (quoted n. 1), p. 181. For a succinct but elucidating chronological account of the Sasanians and their imperial motivations, see M.R. SHAYEGAN, Sasanian Political Ideology, in *The Oxford Handbook of Ancient Iran*, ed. by D.T. Potts, Oxford 2013, pp. 805–13. For notions of rulership and the military ideologies of the Sasanians, see M. WHITBY, The Persian King at War, in *The Roman and Byzantine Army in the East: Proceedings of a colloquium held at the Jagiellonian University, Krákow in September 1992*, ed. by E. Dąbrowa, Krákow 1994, pp. 227–63; H. BÖRM, Das Königtum der Sasaniden – Strukturen und Probleme. Bemerkungen aus althistorischer Sicht, *Klio* 90, 2008, pp. 423–43; J. WIESEHÖFER, King, court and royal representation in the Sasanian empire, in *The Court and Court Society in Ancient Monarchies*, ed. by A. Spawforth, Cambridge 2007, pp. 58–79; and S. MCDONOUGH, Military and Society in Sasanian Iran, in *The Oxford Handbook of Warfare in the Classical World*, ed. by B. Campbell & L.A. Tritle, Oxford 2013, pp. 601–20. For archaeological and material culture approaches to this question, see D. HUFF, Formation and Ideology of the Sasanian State in the Context of Archaeological Evidence, in *The Idea of Iran*, vol. 3, *The Sasanian Era*, ed. by V.S. Curtis & S. Stewart, London 2008, pp. 31–59; M.P. CANEPA, *The Two Eyes of the Earth: Art and Ritual of Kingship between Rome and Sasanian Iran*, Berkeley 2009; and R.E. PAYNE, Territorializing Iran in Late Antiquity: Autocracy, Aristocracy, and the Infrastructure of Empire, in *Ancient States and Infrastructural Power: Europe, Asia, and America*, ed. by C. Ando & S. Richardson, Philadelphia 2017, pp. 179–217. We now have the expansive study of Iranian imperial ideologies and material culture in M.P. CANEPA, *The Iranian Expanse: Transforming Royal Identity Through Architecture, Landscape, and the Built Environment, 550 BCE–642 CE*, Oakland 2018.

rapidly changing geo-political landscape. They do so by simultaneously drawing from the symbolic repertoire of the timeless thought-world of myth and ritual found in their most ancient Avestan scriptures from the 2nd millennium BCE.[7] As I have argued recently, the Zoroastrian scholastics mobilised a panoply of tradition-constituted hermeneutic interventions that allowed them to reread and reimagine their ancient scriptures as having eternal transcendent validity and authority through deploying often labyrinthine forms of intertextuality and intersignification that retasked and relocalised our oldest attested Iranian texts to explain certain momentous political and religious events in the Sasanian era.[8]

THE HISTORIANS ON HERACLIUS' DESTRUCTION OF THE SASANIAN *PYRAEUM* IN ATROPATENE

The portentous military-political event to be discussed here was Heraclius' destruction of the Zoroastrian fire temple complex that housed the sacred fire known as the Ādur Guš(n)ăsp ('Fire of the Stallion' < OIr. **varšna-* + *aspa-* 'male horse'),[9] near Ganzak (Gk. Γάζακα, Lat.

[7] The *Avesta*, conventionally referred to as the 'Sacred Book of the Persians' is, in fact, an ancient, orally transmitted, liturgically-based ritual corpus redacted by the Zoroastrian priesthood in the Sasanian and early Islamic periods. The language of the Avestan texts falls into two distinct chronological layers. 'Old Avestan' is grammatically very close to the language of the *Ṛg Veda*, the oldest texts in India from approximately the mid-2nd millennium BCE, while the grammar of 'Young Avestan' is somewhat closer to that of the Old Persian inscriptions, first attested during the reign of Darius I (r. 522–486 BCE) in the Achaemenid (550–330 BCE) period. Since the Avestan corpus contains no references to identifiable historical events, these linguistic comparisons are crucial for reconstructing both early Iranian history and the origins of Zoroastrianism. In addition, all the toponyms and hydronyms in the Avestan corpus are from Eastern Iran, Afghanistan, and Central Asia with no secure references to the Iranian plateau.

[8] See, e.g., Y.S.D. VEVAINA, The Hermeneutics of Political Violence in Sasanian Iran: The Death of Mani and the Seizure of Manichaean Property, in *Sasanian Studies: Late Antique Iranian World. Sasanidische Studien: Spätantike iranische Welt*, vol. I, ed. by T. Daryaee & Sh. Farridnejad, Wiesbaden 2022, pp. 291–322.

[9] While I have provided the variant forms in the translations — Ādur Gušnāsp / Gušnasp / Gušasp— as they appear in the original passages, I generically use the form / Ādur Gušnasp / throughout the article. Cf. M. BOYCE, ĀDUR GUŠNASP, *Encyclopædia Iranica* I/5, pp. 475–6 and J. HOWARD-JOHNSTON, KOSROW II, in *EIr.* online (2000 [2010]): https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/khosrow-ii; idem., *Last Great War* (quoted n. 1), pp. 226–7; see also E. GERLAND, Die persischen Feldzüge des Kaisers Herakleios, *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 3/2, 1894, pp. 330–73, esp. p. 354; W.E. KAEGI, *Heraclius. Emperor of Byzantium*, Cambridge 2003, p. 127; R.E. PAYNE, *A State of Mixture: Christians, Zoroastrians, and Iranian Political Culture in Late Antiquity*, Oakland 2015, p. 177; and M.R.J. BONNER, *The Last Empire of Iran*, Piscataway 2020, p. 298, n. 179. For a detailed overview of the literary and archaeological evidence on this temple with extensive references, see K. SCHIPPMANN, *Die iranischen Feuerheiligtümer*, Berlin – New York 1971, pp. 309–57. For an extensive discussion of the Ādur Gušnasp in its Zoroastrian and broader late antique context, see S. MINOV, *Memory and Identity in the Syriac Cave of Treasures: Rewriting the Bible in Sasanian Iran*, Leiden – Boston 2021, pp. 155–63.

Gaza, Arm. Գաւձակ) in Atropatene (Pahl. Ādurbādagān, currently Iranian Azerbaijan) in the summer of 624 CE.[10] This military siege during his surprise counteroffensive[11] was perhaps in revenge for the sack of Jerusalem by the Sasanians a decade earlier and the subsequent expropriating of the 'True Cross' to Ctesiphon by Husraw II.[12] As Howard-Johnston has repeatedly emphasized in his writings, the religious nature of this multi-decade conflict is highly marked and plainly evident.[13] For instance, Theophanes Confessor in his *Chronographia* reports a rousing speech, likely derived from George of Pisidia, in which Heraclius exhorted his troops on the eve of battle:

> "Men, my brethren, let us keep in mind the fear of God and fight to avenge the insult done to God … Let us avenge the rape of our virgins and be afflicted in our hearts as we see the severed limbs of our soldiers. The danger is not without

[10] For the dating of the campaigns I follow HOWARD-JOHNSTON, *Last Great War* (quoted n. 1).

[11] See J. HOWARD-JOHNSTON, Heraclius' Persian campaigns and the Revival of the East Roman Empire, *War in History* 6, 1996, pp. 1–44; and idem., *Last Great War* (quoted n. 1), esp. pp. 214–33. See also W.E. KAEGI, *Heraclius* (quoted n. 9), pp. 100–91 and A.N. STRATOS, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century*, vol. I, transl. by M. Ogilvie-Grant, Amsterdam 1968, pp. 135–236, esp. pp. 151–6. For a useful collection of the sources, see G. GREATREX & S.N.C. LIEU, *The Roman Eastern Frontier and the Persian Wars*. Part II, *AD 363–630: A Narrative Sourcebook*, London – New York 2002, esp. pp. 198–228 and M. WHITBY & M. WHITBY, *Chronicon Paschale 284–628 AD* (TTH 7), Liverpool 1989, Appendix 4, pp. 204–5. See also A. PALMER, *The Seventh Century in the West-Syrian Chronicles* (TTH 15), Liverpool 1993, p. 128, §24 and p. 133, §30 for some historical sources.

[12] For discussions of this traumatic event as history and propaganda, see STRATOS, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century* I (quoted n. 11), pp. 107–11; C. MANGO, Deux études sur Byzance et la Perse sassanide, *Travaux et mémoires* 9, 1985, pp. 91–118; B. FLUSIN, *Saint Anastase le Perse et l'histoire de la Palestine au début du viie siècle*, 2 vols. (Le monde byzantin), Paris 1992; H. SIVAN, From Byzantine to Persian Jerusalem: Jewish Perspectives and Jewish/Christian Polemics, *GRBS* 41, 2000, pp. 277–306; J.W. DRIJVERS, Heraclius and the *Restitutio Crucis*: Notes on Symbolism and Ideology, in *The Reign of Heraclius (610–41): Crisis and Confrontation*, ed. by G.J. Reinink and B.H. Stolte (Groningen Studies in Cultural Change 2), Leuven 2002, pp. 175–90; Y. STOYANOV, *Defenders and Enemies of the True Cross: The Sasanian Conquest of Jerusalem in 614 and Byzantine Ideology of Anti-Persian Warfare*, Vienna 2011, esp. pp. 45–75; C. ZUCKERMAN, Heraclius and the Return of the Holy Cross, *TM* 17, 2013, pp. 197–218; and PH. BOOTH, *Crisis of Empire: Doctrine and Dissent at the End of Late Antiquity*, Berkeley – Los Angeles – London 2014, pp. 94–100.

[13] See, e.g., HOWARD-JOHNSTON, Heraclius' Persian Campaign (quoted n. 11), pp. 36–37 and idem., Pride and fall: Khusro II and his regime, 626–628, in *La Persia e Bisanzio,* ed. by Gh. Gnoli (Atti dei convegni Lincei 201), Rome 2004, pp. 93–113, esp. pp. 102–3. Cf. also K.I. MAKSYMIUK, Destruction of the Ādur Gušnasp temple in Ādurbādagān as a revenge for abduction of the Holy Cross from Jerusalem in the context of the letters of Heraclius, *Метаморфозы истории* 9, 2017, pp. 109–25 and J. ZOUBERI, The role of religion in the foreign affairs of Sasanian Iran and the Later Roman Empire (330–630 A.D.), *Historia i Świat* 6, 2017, pp. 121–32.

recompense: nay, it leads to eternal life. Let us stand bravely, and the Lord our God will assist us and destroy the enemy."[14]

What we can reconstruct from our Greek and Armenian sources is that in 624 CE, Heraclius began his campaign to retake Byzantine Armenia,[15] and after passing through Armenia he entered Atropatene, where he sacked and desecrated the great fire temple complex there. In the closing lines of the second *acroasis* of his *Heraclias*, George of Pisidia, the official panegyrist to the Byzantine emperor, states unequivocally:

> "That man [Artaser, i.e., Ardašīr I, the founder of the Sasanian Empire, r. 224–242 CE] then, founded this city as a most lofty tower, as an indestructible place, as a wall – so he showed – for sin; [200] for there Chosroes [Husraw II] kept both the magi and the coals which were his guardians (τοὺς ἑαυτοῦ προστάτας τοὺς ἄνθρακας), understandably overcome by terrible suspicion that you might seize as prisoners those whom he revered. But you yourself came like lightning's speed [205] and fashioned for them a feigned slaughter – for you yourself do not want slaughter, even of barbarians, unless they draw swords against yourself: setting up many mechanisms and devices, rams, tortoises, slings for throwing rocks, [210] both strengthening your battle-line, and with a new wall enclosing all about the whole of

[14] Theophanes, AM 6114, *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor: Byzantine and Near Eastern History AD 284–813*, transl. and comm. by C. MANGO & R. SCOTT with G. GREATREX, Oxford 1990, p. 439 and quoted in P. SARRIS, *Empires of Faith: The Fall of Rome to the Rise of Islam, 500–700*, Oxford 2011, p. 252. See also G.J. REININK, Heraclius, the New Alexander: Apocalyptic Prophecies during the Reign of Heraclius, in *The Reign of Heraclius* (*610–641*): *Crisis and Confrontation*, ed. by G.J. Reinink & B.H. Stolte (Groningen Studies in Cultural Change 2), Leuven 2002, pp. 81–95. See also KAEGI, *Heraclius* (quoted n. 9), pp. 113–4 for Heraclius' invocations of David before his invasion of the Sasanian Empire and cf. also T. SIZGORICH, Sanctified Violence: Monotheist Militancy as the Tie That Bound Christian Rome and Islam, *JAAR* 77/4 (2009), pp. 895–921, esp. p. 905 for a discussion of anti-Persian rhetoric and calls for violence in the name of religion.

[15] For Armenia between the two great powers, see N.G. GARSOÏAN, *Armenia between Byzantium and the Sasanians* (Variorum Collected Studies Series 218), London 1985; B. DIGNAS & E. WINTER, *Rome and Persia in Late Antiquity: Neighbours and Rivals*, Cambridge 2007, pp. 193–209 and T. GREENWOOD, A Contested Jurisdiction: Armenia in Late Antiquity, in *Sasanian Persia: Between Rome and the Steppes of Eurasia*, ed. by E. Sauer, Edinburgh 2017, pp. 199–220.

their wall, you captured all within by fear alone. First then, master, out of all the spoils, you burnt to ashes the gods of Persia, [215] presenting to your God as acceptable first-fruits the treasures of Chosroes' forebearers; for by extinguishing them you were burning Chosroes, not as a foe of the essence of fire – for you are entirely fire kindled for God – [220] but because you wished to bring before God Creation too, free and saved. For fire as well was released from taint – it had been further violated by adoration – and holds as honour the fair dishonour, [225] purified by your pious destruction; expediently did it endure misfortune – fairly incinerated rather than foully kindled. After thus extinguishing all that fire, you left aside nothing except, so to say, [230] a little spark for burning up Chosroes."[16]

Besides this highly inflammatory rhetoric by George of Pisidia, to be expected from an imperial panegyrist, we also have a later account of this siege by Theophanes, itself partially reliant on George of Pisidia's works, which provides greater geographic specificity and added detail about the military manoeuvres there:

"And when Herakleios heard that Chosroes was in the town of Gazakos (Γαζακός) with 40,000 fighting men, he rushed against him. He sent forward some of his subject Saracens as an advance party and they encountered the watch of Chosroes, some of whom they killed, whilst others they captured and brought to the emperor

[16] George of Pisidia, *Heraclias*, ii.197–230, transl. by MARY WHITBY; cf. ed. and transl. by A. PERTUSI, *Giorgio di Pisidia, Poemi. 1. Panegirici Epici* (Studia patristica et byzantina 7), Ettal 1959, pp. 260–1. For George's life and works, see M. WHITBY, A New Image for a New Age: George of Pisidia on the Emperor Heraclius, in *The Roman and Byzantine Army in the East*, ed. by E. Dąbrowa, Kraków 1994, pp. 197–225 and idem., George of Pisidia's Presentation of the Emperor Heraclius and his Campaigns: Variety and Development, in *The Reign of Heraclius (610–41): Crisis and Confrontation*, ed. by G.J. Reinink & B.H. Stolte (Groningen Studies in Cultural Change 2), Leuven 2002, pp. 157–73. On George's presentation of the Byzantine-Persian wars in religious terms, see also J.D.C. FRENDO, Classical and Christian Influences in the *Heracliad* of George of Pisidia, *The Classical Bulletin* 62/4, 1986, pp. 53–62; idem., The Early Exploits and Final Overthrow of Khusrau II (591–628): Panegyric and Vilification in the Last Byzantine-Iranian Conflict, *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* 9, 1995, pp. 209–14; and I. HUBER, Ansichten eines Zivilisierten über die unzivilisierte Welt: Das Sāsāniden-Bild des Georgios Pisides und sein historischer Wert für den spätantiken Iran, *Klio* 90/1, 2008, pp. 162–92.

together with their commander. When he had learnt of this, Chosroes abandoned the town and his army and took to flight. Herakleios gave pursuit, and some he overtook and killed, whilst the rest escaped and scattered. And when the emperor reached the town of Gazakos <he restored his army in its suburbs. The Persians who had taken refuge with him said that Chosroes had destroyed with fire all the crops in those parts and had fled to the town of Thebarmais> in the east, wherein were the temple of Fire and the treasure of Croesus, king of Lydia, and the deceit of the coals. Setting out from Gazakos, the emperor reached Thebarmais, which he entered and burnt down the temple of Fire as well as the entire city..."[17]

While highly evocative, these accounts admittedly do not mention the indigenous Persian name of the fire or temple complex. For that crucial piece of evidence we must turn to the *History* attributed to bishop Sebeos where we find the sacred fire referred to by its Armenian name:

"Heraclius marched on with 120,000 to go to the court of the Persian king. He travelled though the regions of the north, making directly for the city of Karin; and having reached Dvin in Ayrarat, he ravaged it and Nakhchawan. Proceeding to Gandzak in Atrapatakan, he also destroyed the altars of the great Fire which they called Vshnasp."[18]

[17] Theophanes, *Chronographia*, AM 6114, transl. and comm. by MANGO & SCOTT, pp. 439–40 (quoted n. 14). The < > represent words supplied from the Latin translation by the papal librarian Anastasius (d. *ca*. 879 CE). For an assessment of the historical value of Theophanes (769/60–818 CE), his sources, and editorial issues, see HOWARD-JOHNSTON, *Witnesses* (quoted n. 3), pp. 268–312, esp., pp. 274–95; see also A.S. PROUDFOOT, The Sources of Theophanes for the Heraclian Dynasty, *Byzantion* 44, 1974, pp. 367–439.

[18] Sebeos, *The Armenian History Attributed to Sebeos*, Part 1, transl. by R.W. THOMSON; Part 2, comm. by J. HOWARD-JOHNSTON, with T. GREENWOOD (TTH 31), Liverpool 1999, p. 81, §124. Cf. Movsēs Dasxurançi, *The History of Caucasian Albanians*, transl. by C.J.F. DOWSETT (London Oriental Series 8), London 1961, p. 79, n. 2. Cf. also the reference to the destruction of fire temples in in Nikephoros, *Short History* 19: "... (Herakleios) invaded Persia and set about destroying cities and overturning fire temples..."; text, transl. and comm. by C. MANGO (CFHB 13), Washington, D.C. 1990, p. 57. For an assessment of the historical value of Nikephoros (b. *ca*. 758) and his sources, see HOWARD-JOHNSTON, *Witnesses* (quoted n. 3), pp. 237–67, esp. pp. 244–56. For earlier references to Christian destruction of fire temples, see PAYNE, *A State of Mixture* (quoted n. 9), pp. 46–8.

Tʿovma Artsruni's later version in Armenian from the 10th century CE includes still further details, not included in the *History* attributed to Sebeos, about the desecration of the shrine, such as the pollution of its sacred lake with the war dead:

> "Reaching Dvin he [Heraclius] sacked it, and also Nakjchavan and Ormi [Lake Urmia]. Attacking Gandzak in Atrpatakan, he destroyed it; he plundered Hamadan and May, overthrew the great fire altar called Vshnasp, and filled the lake opposite the pyraeum with corpses."[19]

In the third chapter of the second book of the *Universal History* of Stepʿanos Tarōnecʿi, also written in Armenian and completed in 1004/5 CE, we find yet another mention of the destruction of this fire temple with still additional geographical references provided:

> "He marched against the king of Persia and came to the city of Karin. He arrived at the city of Dvin and destroyed it. And he undermined from their foundations Naxčawan and Ganjak and Hedak. And he demolished the altars of the great fire which they used to call Vnasp. He plundered the country of Persia and turned through Media."[20]

All these accounts taken in aggregate provide us with clear evidence for the religious dimension of this particular siege during Heraclius' campaign and they also serve as a launching point for evaluating the lesser-known Sasanian side of this symbolically-charged event.

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[19] Tʿovma Artsruni, *History of the House of the Artsrunikʿ*, transl. and comm. by R.W. THOMSON, Detroit 1985, p. 159, and see n. 4 for further details. The transfer of the Ādur Gušnasp from Ganzak to the place called "al-Birka" (i.e., 'the pond') by Husraw I is mentioned by al-Maʿsūdī, *Murūǧ al-ḏahab* 68, ed. by B. de MEYNDAR, P. DE COURTEILLE, & CH. PELLAT, *Masʿūdī. Les prairies d'or*. 7 vols (2nd rev. ed.; Publications de l'Université Libanaise, Section des études historiques 11), Beirut 1966–1979, vol. 2, p. 398.

[20] Stepʿanos Tarōnecʿi, *Universal History*, §713, transl. and comm. by T. GREENWOOD, *The Universal History of Stepʿanos Tarōnecʿi. Introduction, Translation, and Commentary*, Oxford 2017, p. 181.

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND LITERARY SOURCES FROM THE SASANIAN AND ZOROASTRIAN SIDE

While Pahlavi literature is notorious for its intractable ahistoricity, legendary content, and opaque narratological structures, we are fortunate to posses a handful of quasi-mythological references to this most sacred of Zoroastrian fires and its neighbouring lake [Image 1: Photo (c) Matthew P. Canepa].

One of our only securely datable Pahlavi texts, *Wizīdagīhā ī Zādspram* ('Selections of Zādspram') provides us with a brief description of the lake near the Ādur Gušnasp, utilizing a form of mythic relocalisation that associated the *čēčast war* (alt. *war ī čēčast*) 'Lake Čēčast' with the archaic Avestan *caēcasta*-, a mythic hydronym originally located in Afghanistan or Central Asia.[21] Zādspram, the 9th century CE Zoroastrian high priest of Sīrjān (in today's

[21] See A. TAFAZZOLI, Čēčast, in *EIr*. V/1, pp. 107–8.

Kerman Province in Iran), describes this lake as follows: "Lake Čēčast (which is) *salty, hot, without current, without animals, on the banks of which stands the victorious Ādur Gušnasp" (*čēčast war ī* $^{+}$*sōr ī garmōg* <*ī*> *a-tag ī ǰud-dad kē-š pad bār nišīnēd ādur ī gušnasp ī pērōzgar*).[22] We also find a similar description of the fire and its neighbouring lake in the ʿAbbāsid-era apocalyptic text *Zand ī Wahman Yasn* as part of an *ex eventu* prophecy involving the three historical enemies of the Sasanians:

> "And the third one [battle] at the end of your millennium, O Spitaman Zarduxšt [Zaraϑuštra of the Spitamid clan], when all those three, the Turk (*turk*), the Arab (*tāzīg*), and the Roman (*hrōmāyīg*), will arrive to this place, that is, there was one who said, 'The plain of Nišānag [Nihāvand?].' All the townsfolk of the Iranians (*ērān dehān*) which I, Ohrmazd, have created, will arrive to Padišxwārgar from their own dwellings, that is, there was one who (said): 'Ādur Gušnasp, at the deep Lake Čēčast, of warm waters and anti-demonic' (*ādur gušnasp pad war ī čēčast ī zofr ī garm-āb ī ǰud-dēw*)."[23]

These passages in Pahlavi, laconic as they are, serve as crucially important narrative evidence from the Persian side for securely correlating the accounts of the western historians with the Sasanian archaeological remains at hand. The identification of Theophanes' Thebarmais

[22] *WZ.* 3.24, transl. mine following the ed. and transl. by PH. GIGNOUX & A. TAFAZZOLI, *Anthologie de Zādspram : édition critique du texte pehlevi traduit et commenté*, Paris 1993, p. 44; Their emendation to / $^{+}$*sōr* / "salty" is based on the divergent readings < LHYk > for / *dūr* / "distant, far" (K35b 240r) and < zwl > for / *zōr* / "strength" or / *zūr* / "deceitful" (TD4a 497), both of which are problematic. Helmut Humbach emended the form to / $^{+}$*zōfr* / "deep" (assuming a dropped < p > in < $^{+}$zwpl >) in H. HUMBACH, Ātur Gušnasp und Takht ī Suleimān, in *Festschrift für Wilhelm Eilers*, ed. by G. Wiessner, Wiesbaden 1967, p. 190. Cf. also the discussion of this passage in M. TARDIEU, Les gisements miniers de l'Azerbayjan méridional (région de Taxt-e Soleyman) et la localisation de Gazaka, *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* 12, 1998, p. 261, n. 21.

[23] *ZWY.* 6.10, transl. after the ed. and transl. by C.G. CERETI, *The Zand ī Wahman Yasn: A Zoroastrian Apocalypse* (Serie Orientale Roma 75), Rome 1995, p. 161, and see his comm. on / *ērān dehān* / on p. 202. The floating toponym Padišxwārgar (OP. Pātišuvari-; Elam. Pattišmarriš), is typically associated with the area of Māzandarān on the southern coast of the Caspian Sea and in the adjacent Central Alborz mountain range but is also found in Pahlavi literature referencing Kerman in South Central Iran in Pahl. *Vd.* 1.17b.

(Θηβαρμαῖς),[24] approximately 100 km south-east of Ganzak[25] in the mountains of eastern Atropatene,[26] with the remains of the sacred *pyraeum* of the Ādur Gušnasp sanctuary is conclusively proven by the bullae excavated near the modern city of Šīz,[27] 45 km northeast of modern Takāb, at the site locally known as Takt-e Solaymān (تخت سلیمان or 'Throne of Solomon') since the Timurid invasions.[28] The temple complex, now a UNESCO World Heritage Site, housed one of the three most venerable fires of the Sasanians, along with the Ādur Burzēn-Mihr ('Fire of Mihr [= Miθra] Exalted'), the fire of the agricultural estate in

[24] Cf. HOWARD-JOHNSTON, *Armenian History* (quoted n. 18), p. 215. Cf. also V. MINORSKY, Roman and Byzantine Campaigns in Atropatane, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 11/2, 1944, pp. 248–51 for a discussion of the geographical variants, *viz*., Βιθαρμαϊς, Βεραμαϊς, Θηβαρμαϊς, and Δαραρτασις, and see the critical comments of TARDIEU, Les gisements miniers (quoted n. 22), p. 260, n. 13. See also the extensive survey of the different historical names in SCHIPPMANN, *Feuerheiligtümer* (quoted n. 9), pp. 339–57.

[25] Ganzak is attested in Pahlavi literature in *Šahrestān ī Ērānšahr* ('The Cities of the Land of the Iranians') 58: "In the region of Ādūrbādagān, the city of Ganzag was built by Frāsiyāg, the son of Tūr" (*pad kust ādūrbādagān šahrestān ī ganzag* $^{+}$*frāsiyāg* [*ī*] *tūr kard*), ed. and transl. after T. DARYAEE, *Šahrestānīhā ī Ērānšahr. A Middle Persian Text on Late Antique Geography, Epic and History*, Costa Mesa 2002, p. 23 and p. 28. For the Georgian sources on the socio-religious diversity of Ganzak (Geo. Ganžak) including Jews, Christians, Manichaeans, and Zoroastrians, see S.A. RAPP JR, *The Sasanian World through Georgian Eyes: Caucasia and the Iranian Commonwealth in Late Antique Georgian Literature*, London – New York 2014, pp. 46–51 and pp. 94–9. For the Syriac Persian Martyr Acts as sources for Ādurbādagān (Syr. ʾdwrbygn) and Ganzak (Syr. gnzk), see CH. JULLIEN, Contributions des Actes des Martyrs Perses à la géographie historique et à l'administration de l'empire sassanide (II), in *Des Indo-Grecs aux Sassanides : données pour l'histoire et la géographie historique*, ed. by R. Gyselen (Res Orientales 17), Bures-sur-Yvette 2007, p. 82 and p. 89 respectively.

[26] See H.C. RAWLINSON, Memoir on the Site of the Atropatenian Ecbatana, *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London* 10, 1840, pp. 65–158; J. MARKWART, *A Catalogue of the Provincial Capitals of Ērānshahr (Pahlavi Text, Version and Commentary)*, Rome 1931, pp. 108–10; V. MINORSKY, Roman and Byzantine Campaigns (quoted n. 21), p. 254; and M. BOYCE, GANZAK, in *EIr.* X/3, pp. 289–90.

[27] Based on the marshalling of literary, historical, and archaeological evidence, it has been argued that the Ādur Gušnasp was perhaps originally located in the city of Ganzak, situated close to the southern shore of Lake Urmia. However, early in the 5th century CE, it was apparently transferred to the city of Šīz (Takt-e Solaymān), located some 160 km south-east of Lake Urmia. For further details and a discussion of mythic re-localisation of ancient Avestan myths and legends, see M. BOYCE & F. GRENET with a contribution by R. BECK, *A History of Zoroastrianism*, vol. 3, *Zoroastrianism under Macedonian and Roman Rule*, Leiden 1991, pp. 73–81. Helmut Humbach suggested an ingenious linguistic sequence of assimilations and dissimilations to derive Pers. Šīz from the mythical Caēcasta sea in Avestan: *Šīz* < *Cīc* < *Cīs* < *Cēcas* < *Caēcasta*-, in HUMBACH, Ātur Gušnasp und Takht ī Suleimān (quoted n. 21), pp. 189–90.

[28] For archaeological discussions of the site, see R. NAUMANN, *Die Ruinen von Tacht-e Suleiman und Zendan-e Suleiman und Umgebung* (Führer zu archäologischen Plätzen in Iran, Bd. 2), Berlin 1977, esp. pp. 46–56 (see p. 70 for an image of the bulla of the priest of the Ādur Gušnasp); D. HUFF, The Functional Layout of the Fire Sanctuary at Taxt-e Solaymān, in *Current Research in Sasanian Archaeology, Art, and History*, ed. by D. Kennet & P. Luft (*BAR International Series* 1810), Oxford 2008, pp. 1–14; and M. TARDIEU, Les gisements miniers (quoted n. 19), pp. 249–68. See also A. MOUSAVI & T. DARYAEE, The Sasanian Empire. An Archaeological Survey, c.220– AD 640, in *A Companion to the Archaeology of the Ancient Near East*, ed. by D.T. Potts, Chichester 2012, pp. 1085–87 and D. HUFF, TAḴT-E SOLAYMĀN, in *EIr.* Online (2002): https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/takt-e-solayman.

Parthia,[29] and the Ādur Farnbāg ('Fire having a share through Fortune'), the fire of the priestly estate in Pārs.[30]

The importance of the Ādur Gušnasp, the fire of the warrior estate and the most venerated of Sasanian fires, simply cannot be exaggerated. Matthew Canepa best summarizes its central place in Sasanian imperial myth and courtly practice:

> "The Sasanian kings travelled to Ādur Gušnasp by horse; however, at the sanctuary's walls they dismounted and entered on foot as a sign of humility and respect. Through the contiguous link this sacred itinerary established [sic] the Sasanian kings anchored the traditions and rituals of the coronation to the primordial weight of Ādur Gušnasp. This long-distance link, in turn, associated the Sasanian kings' temporal coronations with the royal sacral significances of the site, first among which was the mythological arrival of the once itinerant fire at the site to aid their mythical Kayānid 'ancestor,' Kay Husraw, in wresting it from the forces of darkness.[31] There they would lavish rich gifts on the sanctuary, an act that the kings would often repeat over the course of their reign when praying for victory or giving thanksgiving. According to the *Šāhnāma*, after his victory over Bahrām Čobin, Kosrow II spent a week at the site circumambulating the fire while reciting

[29] For further details, see M. BOYCE, ĀDUR FARNBĀG, in *EIr.* I/5, pp. 473–5.

[30] Cf. *Dk.* 6.293 for these associations. For further details, see M. BOYCE, ĀDUR BURZĒN-MIHR, *EIr.* I/5, pp. 472–3. For a survey of the glyptic sources for the three sacred fires, see R. GYSELEN, Les grands Feux de l'empire sassanide: quelques témoignages sigillographiques, in *Religious themes and texts in pre-Islamic Iran and Central Asia. Studies in honour of Professor Gherardo Gnoli on the occasion of his 65th birthday on 6th December 2002*, ed. by C.G. Cereti, M. Maggi, & E. Provasi (Beiträge zur Iranistik 24), Wiesbaden 2003, pp. 131–8, esp. p. 131, n. 4 and n. 7 and idem., *La géographie administrative de l'Empire sassanide. Les témoignages sigillographiques* (Res Orientales I), Paris 1989, pp. 43–4. See also G. KÖNIG, Zur Frage 'ewiger' Feuer im Avesta und in der zoroastrischen Tradition, *Iran and the Caucasus* 19, 2015, pp. 9–68.

[31] An aetiological myth in the *Bundahišn* (18.8), the Zoroastrian text on 'Creation' in Pahlavi, provides us with an emic explanation for the name of this sacred fire and its Avestan mythoepic antecedents: "Until the reign of Kay Husraw [i.e., Av. Kauui Haosrauuah, the legendary namesake of Husraw I and Husraw II], the Ādur Gušnasp guarded the world in this way: When Kay Husraw razed the idolatrous temples on Lake Čēčast, the fire settled on the mane of his horse. It struck at the darkness and gloom and burned brightly until he destroyed them. He established fire temples (*ātaxšgāhīhā*, lit. 'places of fire') in that very place, on Mount Asnwand. This is why they call it the Gušnasp (fire), because it settled on the mane (*buš*) of his horse (*asp*)," transl. by D. AGOSTINI & S. THROPE, *The Bundahišn: The Zoroastrian Book of Creation*, Oxford 2020, p. 97.

the Zand and Avesta, perhaps reflecting practices that the kings also enacted after their coronation process. The kings often spent several days at Ādur Gušnasp and maintained an audience hall at the site, implying a connection with another set of ritual practices."[32]

As Canepa notes, royal visits were made to the Ādur Gušnasp, including those by Wahrām V Gōr ('the Onager,' r. 421–439 CE), and Husraw I Anōšag-ruwān ('of Immortal Soul,' r. 531–579 CE) prior to Husraw II Abarwēz ('Triumphant,' r. 591–628 CE). These royal visits were accompanied by lavish endowments to the fire temple, infamous for its enormous—looted—wealth discussed at length in both Byzantine and Islamic sources.[33] Richard Payne has similarly argued that shrines such as these functioned as vital ideological tools in the construction of Sasanian imperial infrastructure by drawing upon the Zoroastrian mythic past:

"The shrines commemorated politically potent events from the mythical past in regional landscapes, connecting the Kayanian and Sasanian dynasties in space as well as time... The shrines territorialized the myths of Iranian ideology while housing an embryonic imperial apparatus of Zoroastrian priests."[34]

[32] CANEPA, *Two Eyes of the Earth* (quoted n. 6), p. 15 with extensive notes and references.

[33] See Y. YAMAMOTO, The Zoroastrian Temple Cult of Fire in Archaeology and Literature II, *Orient* 17, 1981, p. 75 with references. For instance, Wahrām V Gōr dispatched booty of precious stones from the Khāqān's diadem to be hung in the fire-temple in Azerbaijan after defeating the Turks, for which, see al-Ṭabarī, I, §865, transl. by C.E. BOSWORTH, *The History of al-Ṭabarī (Taʾrīkh al-rusul waʾl-mulūk)*, vol. 5, *The Sāsānids, the Byzantines, the Lakhmids, and Yemen*, Albany 1999, pp. 96–7. For further references in the Perso-Arabic historians, see Y. MORADI & A. HINTZE, A new sealing of Pērōz from Taḵt-e Solaymān and its historical context, in *Persia (552 BCE–758 CE)*: *Primary Sources, Old and New*, ed. by R. Gyselen (Res Orientales 28), Bures-sur-Yvette 2020, p. 131, n. 91. For the vast financial resources and wealth accrued by Husraw II, see the posthumous article of Z. RUBIN, The Financial Affairs of the Sasanian Empire Under Khusrow II Parvez, *eSasanika* 17, 2017, 1–29.

[34] PAYNE, Territorializing Iran (quoted n. 6), p. 191.

Canepa, in turn, has argued most compellingly that most of these fire sanctuaries are post-Achaemenid creations and that the Great Fires were substantially, if not entirely, constructed in the Sasanian period as part of an imperial project of constructing a new primordial topography:

> "While the Sasanians were extremely adept at adapting their political cosmology to respond to and explain the contemporary geopolitical situation, they were equally skilled at reshaping the actual built and natural environments to cohere with and support that vision of the world. As the culmination of Iran's royal and sacred traditions, the dynasty set about claiming all-important provincial sites and traditions to ensure that the Iranian world conformed to their new political cosmology."[35]

While our extant Pahlavi texts only provide us with refracted glimpses into this thought-world of re-territorialized myths reindexed to a new primordial topography, it is the imperial footprint of the priestly bureaucracy at Takt-e Solaymān that has, against all odds, survived the vagaries of history and serves as a pointed reminder of survivorship bias. 234 clay bullae with 900 impressions of seals were discovered *in situ* at Takt-e Solaymān by German excavations in 1963 and 72 bullae with 179 impressions were subsequently found in 1964.[36] Most recently, 824 clay bullae bearing nearly 2,000 seal impressions (hence, some bullae have multiple impressions from both primary Sasanian and secondary Il-Khanid contexts) were also discovered during archaeological excavations conducted there in 2002–2008 by an Iranian team

[35] CANEPA, *The Iranian Expanse* (quoted n. 6), p. 289; see pp. 271–90 for a broader discussion of this project of mythic relocalisation and see esp. pp. 283–8 for an extensive treatment of Takt-e Solaymān.

[36] R. NAUMANN, A Fire Temple of the Magians in N. W. Persia, *Illustrated London News* 16/1, 1965, pp. 23–5. See also R. NAUMANN, D. HUFF, & R. SCHNYDER, Takht-i Suleiman: Bericht über die Ausgrabungen 1965–1973, *Archäologischer Anzeiger* 90, 1975, pp. 109–204; R. GÖBL, *Die Tonbullen vom Tacht-e Suleiman. Ein Beitrag zur spätsāsānidischen Sphragistik* (Deutches Archäologisches Institut. Abteilung Teheran Bd. 1), Berlin 1976; and SCHIPPMANN, *Feuerheiligtümer* (quoted n. 9), esp. pp. 328–38. For a more recent bibliographical enumeration of the archaeological excavations of this fire sanctuary with literature, see M.P. CANEPA, Building a New Vision of the Past in the Sasanian Empire: The Sanctuaries of Kayānsīh and the Great Fires of Iran, *Journal of Persianate Studies* 6, 2013, p. 80.

under the direction of Yousef Moradi.[37] The excellent preservation of the bullae from the fire temple complex at Takt-e Solaymān was a most fortuitous product of having been both petrified by the salty water of the lake and a fire having baked the bullae [Image 2: Photo (c) Matthew P. Canepa].

The bullae that serve to precisely identify the site with our literary sources have inscriptional Middle Persian legends (in a different script from 'Book' Pahlavi) that testify to the varied administrative roles of the Zoroastrian priesthood at the shrine. They unequivocally read: < ʾtwly ZY gwšnspy > "Ādur Gušnasp" or < PW[N] BYTʾy ZY ʾtwly ZY gwšnspy mgwpty > "Chief Magus in the (fire) house of the Ādur Gušnasp" or < bwhtwky ZY ʾmtrʾn ZY ʾtwl ZY gwšnspy dpywl > "Bōxtōg, son of Āmihr [alt. Hamihr], scribe of the Ādur

[37] MORADI & HINTZE, A new sealing of Pērōz (quoted n. 33), pp. 111–34, esp. pp. 114–5.

Gušnasp."[38] In addition to these spectacular finds, the extensive sigillographic evidence excavated at Takt-e Solaymān in particular and the Sasanian world in general corroborates Agathias' statements from the 6th century CE about the ubiquitous socio-religious and administrative roles of the Zoroastrian priesthood:

> "Nowadays, however, the magi are the objects of extreme awe and veneration, all public business being conducted at their discretion and in accordance with their prognostications, and no litigant or party to a private dispute fails to come under their jurisdiction. Indeed nothing receives the stamp of legality in the eyes of the Persians unless it is ratified by one of the magi."[39]

In addition to the ubiquity of their administrative responsibilities, the magi are commonly understood in the classical sources as being in charge of mysteries surrounding their sacred fires.[40] Once again, a statement by Agathias proves particularly *apropos* here:

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[38] PH. GIGNOUX, Les noms propres en moyen-perse épigraphique, in *Pad nām i yazdān. Études d'épigraphie, de numismatique et d'histoire de l'Iran ancien* (Travaux de l'Institut d'études iraniennes 9), Paris 1979, p. 77. For the bullae from Takt-e Solaymān with equine elements containing 'Gušnasp' in their legends, see GÖBL, *Die Tonbullen vom Tacht-e Suleiman* (quoted n. 36), pp. 44–57, §7, §22, §27, §50, §122, §248, §277, §363, §365, §372, §375, §403, §482, §601, §697a, §703. For the various administrative functions of the Zoroastrian priesthood, see PH. GIGNOUX, Die religiöse Administration in sasanidischer Zeit: Ein Überblick, in *Kunst, Kultur und Geschichte der Achämenidenzeit und ihr Fortleben,* ed. by H. Koch & D.N. MacKenzie, Berlin 1983, pp. 251–66; idem., Pour une esquisse des functions religieuses sous les Sasanides, *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 4, 1983, pp. 93–108; and SH. SHAKED, Administrative Functions of Priests in the Sasanian Period, in *Proceedings of the First European Conference of Iranian Studies,* Part 1, *Old and Middle Iranian Studies,* ed. by Gh. Gnoli and A. Panaino, Rome 1990, pp. 261–73. For the Sasanian administration of Armenia / Ādurbādagān and its bureaucratic personnel, see N. GARSOÏAN, Armenian Sources on Sasanian Administration, in *Sources pour l'histoire et la géographie du monde iranien (224–710)*, ed. by R. Gyselen (Res Orientales 18), Bures-sur-Yvette 2009, pp. 91–114 and M. GHODRAT-DIZAJI, Ādurbādagān during the Late Sasanian Period: A Study in Administrative Geography, *IRAN* 48, 2010, pp. 69–80, esp. pp. 76–8.

[39] Agathias, *Histories*, II, 26.5, transl. by J.D. FRENDO, *Agathias: The Histories. Translated with an Introduction and Short Explanatory Notes* (Corpus fontium historiae Byzantinae, vol. 2A. Ser. Berolinensis) Berlin – New York, 1975, p. 61. For a rich and detailed study of Agathias' knowledge and sources of information on the Sasanians, see A. CAMERON, Agathias on the Sasanians, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 23, 1969–1970, pp. 67–183, esp. 86–7.

[40] See A. DE JONG, *Traditions of the Magi: Zoroastrianism in Greek and Latin Literature* (Religions in the Graeco-Roman World 133) Leiden – New York – Köln 1997, pp. 343–50 and PH. VASUNIA, *Zarathushtra and the Religion of Ancient Iran: The Greek and Latin Sources in Translation*, Mumbai 2007, pp. 245–50.

> "They [the Persians] name many other gods, whom they worship, and they perform sacrifices and practise ritual purifications and divination. Fire is considered an object of peculiar sanctity and veneration. Accordingly it is tended in certain remote and sacred chambers by the magi who never allow it to go out. Gazing into it they perform their secret rites and scrutinise the course of future events."[41]

This statement, while part of the Orientalizing discourse mobilizing exoticizing tropes associated with the Persians, their fire cult, and various claims of magic and divination, does, nevertheless, find some support in an unlikely corner of Zoroastrian literature, namely, the hermeneutic tradition in Pahlavi.

ZOROASTRIAN HERMENEUTICS AS SASANIAN HISTORIOGRAPHY

In my opinion, Pahlavi hermeneutics represents the most valuable yet under-utilized resource for developing a deeper understanding of the historical development of Zoroastrian communities as they transitioned from a thought-world built upon the mytho-epic archetypes of the archaic Iranian world of competitive pastoral nomadism in Central Asia and Afghanistan in the 2nd millennium BCE into one of elite socio-religious dominance in Sasanian Late Antiquity where competition represented inter-religious rivalries and great power politics. These profound changes finally gave way to the Islamic era when ever-increasing apostasy and the pressures of minoritisation provided equally powerful new stimuli for historicizing their increasingly uncomfortable social realities through novel hermeneutical interventions. These momentous social and intellectual transformations are characteristically alluded to in the most subtle ways in Pahlavi literature precisely because the intended audience—fellow priests—

[41] Agathias, *Histories*, II, 25.1, transl. by FRENDO, *Agathias* (quoted n. 38), p. 59. Cf. also text and transl. by CAMERON, *Agathias on the Sasanians* (quoted n. 39), pp. 82–3.

were well aware of all the religious and cultural allusions being made. We moderns simply do not possess the requisite level of insider knowledge due to the myriad transmissional and hermeneutical challenges of Pahlavi literature which have baffled and continue to frustrate even the most erudite and dedicated of Iranists.

That being said, the key text for our purposes is found in the ninth book of the *Dēnkard*, which, with its seven extant books of nine originally, serves as the largest surviving text in Pahlavi literature. *Dēnkard* Book 9 has an especially opaque pre-history, which is worth briefly summarizing for non-specialists. It comprises three Pahlavi 'Table of Contents'-style summaries of 'lost' Young Avestan commentaries (Pahl. *nask* < Av. *naska-*, perhaps meaning a 'bundle') on the 'Old Avesta,' namely:

(1) the five Old Avestan *Gāϑā*s or 'Poems' (*Yasna* 28–34, 43–51, 53) ascribed to the prophet Zaraϑuštra himself, the fountainhead of the Zoroastrian tradition;

(2) an Old Avestan 'rhythmic-prose' text called the *Yasna Haptaŋhāiti* ('The Ritual in 7 Sections,' *Y*. 35–41);[42] and

(3) four short but highly revered prayers (*Y.* 27.13; 27.14; 27.15; and 54.1) also in Old Avestan that bookend the *Gāϑā*s.[43]

These Old Avestan texts represent the most archaic textual kernel within the recitation of the *Yasna* liturgy, comprising 72 *hāiti*s ('sections') in our manuscripts and found in a later stage and in a related dialect, namely 'Young Avestan.' Essentially, we have these highly archaic Old Avestan texts that we date to the mid-2nd millennium BCE on linguistic grounds embedded

[42] For our standard critical edition, see A. HINTZE, *A Zoroastrian Liturgy: The Worship in Seven Chapters* (*Yasna 35–41*) (Iranica 12), Wiesbaden 2007.

[43] *Dk.* 9 contains the *Sūdgar Nask* (*Dk*. 9.1–23), the *Warštmānsr Nask* (*Dk*. 9.24–46), and the *Bag Nask* (*Dk*. 9.47–69), containing 22, 23, and 22 *fragard*s (perhaps from **pari-karta-*, lit. 'cuts, divisions') respectively, each indexed with the first word(s) or *incipit* of the traditional divisions of the Old Avestan texts; (outdated) transl. by E.W. WEST, *Pahlavi Texts*. Part IV: *Contents of the Nasks* (Sacred Books of the East 37), Oxford 1892. For a critical edition of the *Sūdgar Nask*, see Y.S.D. VEVAINA, *The Sūdgar Nask of Dēnkard Book 9. Text, Translation and Critical Apparatus* (Iranica 31) Wiesbaden 2022.

within the *Yasna* liturgy in Young Avestan from perhaps the 1st millennium BCE. These Old and Young Avestan texts are transmitted in our exegetical manuscripts with their word-for-word Pahlavi translations-cum-commentaries or *Zand* that represent orally-derived and transmitted commentaries on these most sacred of Avestan ritual texts culminating in their finally redacted forms some two and a half millennia later in later Sasanian and early Islamic times.[44]

Alongside the Old Avestan base texts and their Pahlavi *Zand*, we also find a meta-hermeneutical tradition in *Dēnkard* Book 9 with highly allegorizing 'Table of Contents' summaries of three radically different Gathic (Pahl. *gāhānīg*) *nask*s or commentaries that purport to be Pahlavi translations of putative Young Avestan commentaries on the Old Avestan texts, presumably akin to the Brāhmaṇa ritual commentaries on the Vedas in India (see n. 43). These Pahlavi résumés in *Dēnkard* Book 9 were, in turn, finally redacted in the 9th century CE but are only attested in medieval manuscripts from the late 16th century onwards, one of which contains a copy of the earliest extant colophon in Pahlavi literature, copied in Baghdad in 1020 CE in the ʿAbbāsid era [see Appendix for a tentative timeline of these texts].[45]

The commentary on the *Yasna Haptaŋhāiti* (*Y*. 35–41) in the first of the three *nask*s, the *Sūdgar Nask* ('The benefit-maker') has the distinction of being both the longest *fragard* or chapter in that *nask* and perhaps the most challenging to correlate with its Old Avestan base text.[46] While the interpretations of the other two *nask*s conform more closely to their Old Avestan base text, the beginning of this *fragard* in the *Sūdgar Nask* (*Dk*. 9.12.1–2) continues

[44] For the most detailed study of the *Zand*, see A. CANTERA, *Studien zur Pahlavi-Übersetzung des Avesta* (Iranica 7), Wiesbaden 2004.

[45] See M.J. DRESDEN, *Dēnkart. A Pahlavi Text. Facsimile Edition of the Manuscript B of the K. R. Cama Oriental Institute Bombay*, Wiesbaden 1966, pp. 640, 17–644, 10; forthcoming transl. with comm. in VEVAINA, *Sūdgar Nask* (quoted n. 43).

[46] *Dk*. 9.12.1–32; for an intertextual commentary, see Y.S.D. VEVAINA, *Zoroastrian Hermeneutics in Late Antiquity: Commentary on the Sūdgar Nask of Dēnkard Book 9* (Iranica 32), Wiesbaden 2022.

the seven "complaint(s) of the Spirit of the Fires" (*garzišn ī ātaxšān mēnōy*) from the preceding *fragard*:

> *11om fragard ēsn abar hanǰaman ī mēnōyān yazdān garzišn ī ātaxš rāy ud hanǰamanīg garzišn ī ātaxš abāg guftan ī ēn-iz kū nē ēdar bawam ud az ēdar ul uzam az zamīg abar ō asmān ānōh an rōšnēnam abar ō haft-kišwar zamīg čiyōn māh ud xwaršēd ud star-iz ī bay-dād ka pad bām ī xwēš rōšnēnēnd*.
>
> "The eleventh *fragard*, the *Yasna* (*Haptaŋhāiti*), is about the assembly (*hanǰaman*) of the gods in the spiritual realm (*mēnōy*) because of the complaint (*garzišn*) of the fire (*ātaxš*); and the complaint of the fire in the assembly together with this, too, that he said: 'I shall not remain here, and from here I will go up from the earth up to the sky. There I will illuminate the earth with its seven regions like the moon, the sun, and the stars as well—established by the Lord (*bay-dād*) [cf. Av. *bayō.dāta-* in *Vd*. 19.23, hence Arab. Baghdād]—when they illuminate by their own brilliance.'"

> [2] *ud gōwišn ī ohrmazd abar rāst-garzišnīh ī ātaxš andar gumēzagīh ī dām <ud> ātaxš a-petyārag dāštan nē* $^{+}$*šāyistan ud dahišn ī dām ō gētīy abāg petyāragōmandīh <ud> ātaxš-iz az dāštan nē šāyistan ī a-dahišnīh ī abāg a-petyāragīh* [*ī*] *ātaxš-iz weh būd rāy ātaxš hunsandēnīdan ud pahrēz paydāgēnīdan*.
>
> "And (about) Ohrmazd's speech about the rightful complaint of the fire (*rāst-garzišnīh ī ātaxš*), (being) in the 'Mixture' (*gumēzagīh*) of the creation (*dām*), (and) the impossibility of keeping the fire without an Adversary (*a-petyārag*); and the establishment of the creation in the material realm (*gētīy*) while having an Adversary (*petyāragōmandīh*); and also the impossibility of keeping the fire from not being established (and) not being affected while not having an Adversary; in

order that the fire was better as well; how to make the fire content; and how to make manifest his care."[47]

I would argue that the references here in *Dk*. 9.12.2 to keeping the fire without an Adversary (*a-petyārag*) and having an adversary (*petyāragōmandīh*) are undoubtedly references to "harm" (*axtiš* in nominative sing. and *axtōiiōi* in dative sing.[48]) in the Old Avestan base text in *Yasna* 36.1d–e:

ahiiā ϑβā āϑrō vərəzānā
paouruuiiē $^{+}$*pairijasāmaidē mazdā ahurā*
ϑβā ϑβā mainiiū spəništā
yə ā axtiš ahmāi
yəm axtōiiōi dåńhē
"Together with the community of this fire here,
we approach you, O Mazdā Ahura, at the beginning,
(We approach) you together with your most Bounteous Spirit
who indeed (causes) harm for the one
whom you consign to harm."[49]

Here in the Avestan we find a reference to the "community of this fire" (*ahiiā … āϑrō vərəzānā*) which is rendered in the *Sūdgar Nask* as "the assembly of the gods in the spiritual realm" (*hanǰaman ī mēnōyān yazdān*), thus re-signifying the community in question as being the divine denizens of the spiritual realm. The central interpretive *topos* here is the "complaint" (*garzišn*[50]) of the fire being unhappy about being compelled to enter and remain in the physical realm and

[47] *Dk*. 9.12.1–2, text and transl. mine; for a full critical apparatus, see VEVAINA, *Sūdgar Nask* (quoted n. 43).

[48] See HINTZE, *A Zoroastrian Liturgy* (quoted n. 42), pp. 113–8 for a detailed linguistic and philological analysis of these forms with valuable text parallels.

[49] Text and transl. after HINTZE, *A Zoroastrian Liturgy* (quoted n. 42), p. 111.

[50] Cf. Skt. *garh*- "to accuse, blame." For the Avestan analogue to the Hesiodic 'poet's complaint,' see P.O. SKJÆRVØ, Rivals and Bad Poets: The Poet's Complaint in the Old Avesta, in *Philologica et Linguistica. Historia, Pluralitas, Universitas. Festschrift für Helmut Humbach zum 80. Geburtstag am 4. Dezember 2001*, ed. by M.G. Schmidt & W. Bisang, Trier 2001, pp. 351–76.

the "impossibility of keeping the Fire without an Adversary" (*ātaxš a-petyārag dāštan nē šāyistan*). I believe this passage serves as the 'hermeneutic trigger' that allowed the Zoroastrian priests to use a complex form of eisegesis and retro-read the destruction of the Ādur Gušnasp shrine back into their most sacred scriptures as shown below.

Following in the *Dēnkard* Book 9 commentary (*Dk*. 9.12.3), we find that the fire, in turn, accedes and requests: "So, take me, O Ohrmazd! So, establish me there, in the middle of the Expanse of the Iranians!" (*ēg man ohrmazd stān ēg man ānōh bē dah pad mayān ērān-wēz*) with Ohrmazd accepting the pleas of the fire in *Dk*. 9.12.4, and "having rubbed him [the fire], he [Ohrmazd] established him in a house in order to provide benefit (*sūdag*) with (regard to) the gathering (of other fires)" (*u-š ān bē sūdag andar mān dād pad ham-barišnīh ayārīh*). We then find Ohrmazd's direct speech to the fire quoted in *Dk*. 9.12.5:

> *u-š ēdōn pad gōwišn guft kū ēdōn tō kē man ātaxš hē rōyišnēnēš pad harwist mān kū rasē ud harwist wis ud harwist zand ud harwist deh ud ēdōn tō burzānd āb ud urwar ud kē-z ahlawān frawahr ka tō pad bē abespārišnīh zōhr frāz barēnd mardōm ka ō tō ēsm frāz barēnd ī hušk ī pad rōšnīh nigerīd u-š ēdōn guft kū ēn ādur gušnāsp*.
> "And thus he [Ohrmazd] spoke, saying: 'In this manner, may you, who are my fire, cause growth in every dwelling where you come, and in every village, every tribe, and every land; and thus, they shall exalt you—the waters and plants and also the pre(existing)-souls of the Righteous ones—when humans bring libations entrusted to you, when they bring you firewood that is dry and inspected by light.' And thus, he [Ohrmazd] / it [the *nask*] said: 'This (is) the Ādur Gušnāsp.'"

Here we find the well-known Zoroastrian *topos* of "causing growth" (in an archaic 2nd sing. optative form *rōyišnēnēš*) implicitly contrasted with the constriction and decrease associated with the malevolent forces of the demons and wicked humans. We also have the well-known

Avestan social climax in the formula: "dwelling, village, tribe, and land" (Pahl. *mān ~ wis ~ zand ~ deh* < Av. *nmāna- ~ vis- ~ zaṇtu- ~ daŋhu-* / *daχiiu-*) but more importantly, we find Ohrmazd reassuring the fire after its "complaint" (*garzišn*) about the inevitable harm which will come to him when he enters the world. In this particular myth, the divinely sanctioned libations that humans across the Iranian world will pay to the fire and the guarantee of his sanctity across the cross-section of Iranian society serve as powerful inducements for the fire to enter the world and brave all the deleterious effects that would inevitably come upon him in a world of 'Mixture' (*gumēzagīh*). Most critically, the fire being specified here in *Dēnkard* Book 9 is explicitly identified as the Ādur Gušnāsp in a gloss in the Pahlavi (with the archaic long-*ā* rendering the *varšna-* + *aspa-* compound) that is not found in the Avestan original: "And thus, he [Ohrmazd] / it [the *nask*] said: 'This (is) the Ādur Gušnāsp'" (*u-š ēdōn guft kū ēn ādur gušnāsp*).

If we turn to the late antique Pahlavi *Zand* or translation-cum-commentary of this Old Avestan original, we similarly find a reference to the 'harm' that comes upon the fire:

> *ēdōn ō ēd ī tō ātaxš pad warzišn fradom bē rasom ohrmazd pad pahrēz ud šnāyēnīdārīh.*
>
> *pad ēd ī tō gāhān pad ēd ī tō mēnōy ī abzōnīg čiyōn az dēn paydāg.*
>
> *kē ō ōy xīndagīh kū pad abar ātaxš anāgīh kunēd ān-iz ō ōy xīndagīh dahēd kū ān-iz pad ōy anāgīh kunēd.*
>
> "Thus, at first, I arrive before this your fire by practising, O Ohrmazd, with care and propitiation.
>
> With these which are your *Gāϑā*s, with this your Bountiful Spirit, as is manifest from the Tradition (*dēn*).

> The one who (gives) illness (*xīndagīh*) to him, that is, the one who inflicts harm (*anāgīh*) upon the fire, that one too gives him an illness, that is, that one too inflicts harm upon him."[51]

I understand these passages as providing an aetiological myth of the tending of the fire where the fire makes a most prescient complaint regarding his future mistreatment at the hands of malevolent individuals in our physical world, suggesting that the gloss in the *Dēnkard* Book 9 passage was produced after Heraclius' destruction of the Ādur Gušnasp in 624 CE. It is precisely these problematic individuals that are, in my reading, being referenced in the interpretation of *Y*. 36.1d–e in the OAv. *Yasna Haptaŋhāiti*: "… who indeed (causes) harm for the one whom you [Ahura Mazdā] consign to harm" (*yə̄ ā axtiš ahmāi* // *yə̄m axtōiiōi dåŋ́hē*) and translated in the Pahlavi *Zand* of *Y*. 36.1c as "illness" (*xindagīh*) and "harm" (*anāgīh*). These texts, and others we will see below, were clearly understood as part of the multiple and overlapping myths concerning the fire's ill-treatment in Avestan and Pahlavi literature.

The mythicising interpretations of the fire and his maltreatment here in the *Yasna Haptaŋhāiti* finds strong intertextual support in the *Pahlavi Rivāyat*, a textual miscellany, where the fire similarly laments about being potentially abandoned in an unjust and unsafe world and the Amahrspands or 'Bounteous Immortals' (Av. Aməṣa Spəṇta) entreat Ohrmazd to nonetheless encourage the fire to enter the world and provide domestic protection for humans. What is significant in this text is the explicit referencing of the three Great Fires of the Sasanians:

> *ud amahrspandān guft kū ka dām bē ō gētīy dahē weh ud sūdōmandtar čiyōn ka ātaxš garzišn nē kunēd dām bē ō gētīy nē dahē bē tō ohrmazd ātaxš stān u-š pad warahrānīh andar mān nišān ēdōn ī-š amā ayārōmandīh ōh kunēm u-š ādur gušnasp pad dast ī*

[51] *PYH* 36.1, text and transl. after A. ZEINI, *Zoroastrian Scholasticism in Late Antiquity. The Pahlavi version of the Yasna Haptaŋhāiti*, Edinburgh 2020, pp. 136–7.

xwēš stad u-š andar mān pad warahrānīh nišāst u-š ādur farnbay ud ān-iz ī burzēnmihr pad dast xwēš bē nišāst u-š ēk ēk āfrīn abar kard kū rōšnīh ī dādār ud nēkīh ī dādār bawēd andar mān ī xwēš.

"And the Amahrspands said: 'If you [Ohrmazd] make the creation in the material realm it will be better (*weh*) and more beneficial (*sūdōmandtar*) (than) if the fire does not complain and you do not make the creation in the material realm. But you, O Ohrmazd take the fire and establish him in victoriousness within a house, thus we can help him.' And he [Ohrmazd] took the Ādur Gušnasp in his own hands and he established it within a house in victoriousness, and he established the Ādur Farnbay and the Ādur Burzēnmihr too with his own hands, and he made blessings over them one by one, (saying): 'You all shall be the light of the creator and the goodness of the creator within your own house(s).'"[52]

Here we find the mythological underpinning of the three estates in the Sasanian realm reflecting the tripartite division of idealized Iranian society into priests, warriors, and agriculturalists, with each group across the empire having a sacred fire "within your own house(s)" (*andar mān ī xwēš*).

The precise location of the Ādur Gušnasp in Ādurbādagān alongside a rationale for its creation and entrance to the world is, likewise, found later in the *Pahlavi Rivāyat*:

ka-š tan bē ō gētīy kāmist dād ā-š garzišn kard kū bē gētīy nē šawam čē-m anāgīh was padiš kunēd. [31] *ud pas ohrmazd ādur ī gušnasp pad ādurbādagān pad warahrānīh bē nišāst*. [32] *u-š guft kū mardōm kār-ēw* $^{+}$*pih ō ātaxš ī kadagīg pādixšāyōmand framūd ud ka-šān ēw pih framūd hād bē ō ātaxš ī warahrān barēnd*

[52] *PR*. 18d.19, transl. mine; cf. the ed. and transl. by A.V. WILLIAMS, *The Pahlavi Rivāyat Accompanying the Dādestān ī Dēnīg*, 2 vols. (Kongelige Danske Videnskabernes Selskab. Historisk–filosofiske Meddelelser 60, 1–2), vol. I, p. 101 and vol. II, p. 38.

a-petyārag bē kunēnd. [33] *ud pas pad āmad ī ō gētīy andar ēstādan ham-dādestān būd*.

"When he [Ohrmazd] wished to create his [the fire's] body for the material realm, then he [the fire] complained: 'I will not go to the material realm, for it will do much harm to me!' [31] And then Ohrmazd installed [lit. 'seated'] the Ādur Gušnasp in Ādurbādagān in victoriousness. [32] And he [Ohrmazd] said: 'People were commanded in an authorized manner (to cook) food on the householder's fire for one meal [lit. 'action, work'] and when they have made one meal, as it were, they will carry it to the Victorious Fire (*ātaxš ī warahrān*) (and) they will make it free from adversity (*a-petyārag*).' [33] And then [the fire] he came into the material realm having agreed (with Ohrmazd)."[53]

Once again, the central theme of the 'complaint' of the fire is discussed and we are told that "Ohrmazd installed (*bē nišāst*) the Ādur Gušnasp in Ādurbādagān in victoriousness (*pad warahrānīh*)," with humans being enjoined to cook a single meal on their domestic fire and subsequently transport it to the Victorious Fire (*ātaxš ī warahrān*), thus making it free from adversity (*a-petyārag*). This injunction in a mythic context here may well encode a quotidian practice for the faithful—monarchs and commoners alike—who resided at or near Takt-e Solaymān and worshipped at its fire temple.

In the Pahlavi translation (*Zand*) of the Young Avestan *Ātaxš Niyāyišn* ('Praise of Fire'), we find further evidence for the Ādur Guš(n)asp's location, the processes of mythic relocalisation, and, once again, an allusion to his complaining (but here with the verb *nālīdan*,

[53] *PR*. 46.30–33, transl. mine; cf. the ed. and transl. by WILLIAMS, *Pahlavi Rivāyat*, vol. I (quoted n. 52), pp. 166–7 and vol. II, p. 75.

nāl- ‘to groan, complain’ rather than *garzīdan*, *garz-* ‘to blame, complain’) in the presence of Ohrmazd once again:

> *ātaxš ī ohrmazd pus ādur gušasp ud kay husraw ud war ī husraw pad ādurbādagān ud asnwand gar ī ohrmazd-dād ud čēčast war ī ohrmazd-dād ay az čēčast ō ān war 4 frasang kayān xwarrah ī ohrmazd-dād u-š kār-ēw artēštārīh ēd kū pad kustag ādurbādagān artēštār tēztar ud tagīgtar bawēnd pad rāh ī ōy bawēd ud nām ī ēn ātaxš ādur gušasp ast. ud kār-ēw ēn ātaxš artēštārīh kū pad andarōn ādurbādagān artēštār tēztar ud tagīgtar ast pad rāh ī ōy ud šāh ī kay husraw abar wahman diz pērōzgarīh ayāft pad ayārīh ī ēn ātaxš ud pad pēš ohrmazd nālīd ud frayād kard ō ēn ādur gušasp būd*.
>
> “(Homage to) the fire, the son of Ohrmazd [= Av. *āθrō ahurahe mazdå puθra*], the Ādur Gušasp and (to) Kay Husraw and Lake Husraw [= Av. *varōiš haosrauuaŋhahe*] in Ādurbādagān; and (to) Mount Asnwand, created by Ohrmazd [= Av. *asnuuaṇtahe garōiš mazdaδātahe*]; and (to) Lake Čēčast, created by Ohrmazd [= Av. *caēcastahe varōiš mazdaδātahe*], that is, it is four leagues (*frasang*) from Čēčast to that lake; to the Fortune (*xwarrah*) of the Kayānians, created by Ohrmazd [= Av. *kāuuaiieheca xᵛarənaŋhō mazdaδātahe*]. And his function is warriorhood, it is this: Through (following) his path, in the region of Ādurbādagān, the warriors will be quicker and stronger; and the name of this fire is the Ādur Gušasp. And the function of this fire is warriorhood, that is, in the interior of Ādurbādagān the warrior is quicker and stronger through (following) his path; and through the aid of this fire, Šāh Kay Husraw obtained victory over the Fortress Wahman and it was this Ādur Gušasp who

complained (*nālīd*) and sought assistance (*frayād kard*) in the presence of Ohrmazd."[54]

What I believe we have in these Pahlavi mythological and hermeneutical texts discussing the complaint of the fire is the traumatic experience of foreign troops desecrating sacred fires being read into, hence prophesied in, the received source materials from archaic Avestan times, much like Agathias' statement that the Magi gaze into the fire and "perform their secret rites and scrutinize the course of future events." The *vaticinium ex eventu* of the magi—the Zoroastrian priesthood—here predicted the course of future events precisely by discovering them in the realm of thought (*mēnōy*) prior to the creation of the material realm (*gētīy*) as we know it. For the Zoroastrian priesthood living in the shadow of the desecration of the Ādur Gušnasp, it would have been truly a world in a state of 'mixture' (*gumēzišn*) where the sacred elements such as the fire himself, the son of Ohrmazd (*ātaxš ī ohrmazd pus*), had harm inflicted upon him by those who polluted him, namely, Heraclius and his soldiers. Even the most sacred of fire temples, the Ādur Gušnasp, dedicated to the brave warriors of Ādurbādagān, and founded by none other than Kay Husraw (Av. Kauui Haosrauuah), the legendary namesake of Husraw II, was not to be spared.

Such a shocking defeat and desecration could not but urgently demand an emotionally satisfying explanation, and, perhaps as critically, invite a tradition-constituted justification that incorporated said event into the Zoroastrian teleology of history. Just as Phil Booth has argued for Heraclius' successful return of the True Cross from Ctesiphon: "The restoration of the Cross at Jerusalem was, therefore, a multivalent event that proclaimed to contemporaries both an era

[54] *ĀN*. 5.5, transl. mine; cf. the transl. by B.N. DHABHAR, *Translation of the Zand-i Khūrtak Avistāk*, Bombay 1963, pp. 67–8; cf. also the ed. and transl. by E.G. RAFFAELLI, *The Sīh-rōzag in Zoroastrianism. A Textual and Historico-Religious Analysis*, London – New York 2014, p. 200.

of renewal and an imminent eschaton,"[55] I believe the desecration of the Ādur Gušnasp served as just such a 'multi-valent event' for their Zoroastrian contemporaries in the Sasanian world. Such a portentous event was not merely a harbinger of the beginning of Sasanian decline and foreign hegemony over the Zoroastrian world as we tend to view it now with the benefit of hindsight, but was interpreted then as a necessary—deterministic and teleological—part of Ohrmazd's grand design for Zoroastrian cosmology. Already encoded in the archaic Avestan scriptures, the fire complains about his future mistreatment but nevertheless dutifully enters the world to serve and be served by those who faithfully tend him.

Ultimately, the Zoroastrian priests were forced by facts on the ground to tacitly acknowledge that "the coals which were his guardians" were ill-served by Husraw II's inability to protect them. Since said event was understood to be scripturally foreordained however, they were, nonetheless, able to grudgingly accept and internalise the enormity of Heraclius' desecration, for as Howard-Johnston pithily suggests, "... he turned fire into a weapon against the fire worshippers."[56]

[55] BOOTH, *Crisis of Empire* (quoted n. 12), p. 160.

[56] HOWARD-JOHNSTON, *Last Great War* (quoted n. 1), p. 227.

Abbreviations

Av. Avesta(n)

ĀN *Ātaxš Niyāyišn*

Bd. *Bundahišn*

Dk. *Dēnkard*

Elam. Elamite

EIr. *Encyclopædia Iranica*

Geo. Georgian

OAv. Old Avesta(n)

OP. Old Persian

Pahl. Pahlavi

Pers. Persian

PR. *Pahlavi Rivāyat accompanying the Dādestān ī Dēnīg*

PY. *Pahlavi Yasna*

PYH. *Pahlavi Yasna Haptaŋhāiti*

Skt. Sanskrit

Syr. Syriac

Vd. *Videvdad*

WZ. *Wizīdagīhā ī Zādspram*

Y. *Yasna*

YAv. Young Avesta(n)

YH. *Yasna Haptaŋhāiti*

ZWY. *Zand ī Wahman Yasn*

APPENDIX: A TIMELINE OF THE (ORAL) TRANSMISSION OF THE AVESTAN AND PAHLAVI TEXTS

Old Avestan texts composed (orally)	Mid-2nd millennium BCE (no geographical referents but language is Eastern Iranian)
Young Avestan texts and their putative commentaries (*nask*s) transmitted (orally)	1st millennium BCE in Afghanistan and Central Asia (no mention of Iranian plateau)
Early Middle Persian (orally transmitted) versions of the Avestan texts (i.e., *Zand*)	Late Parthian period (*ca*. early CE –224 CE) or early Sasanian period (*ca*. 3rd or 4th c. CE)
Mandaean, Manichaean, and Syriac references to the *nask*s	Sasanian period (224–651 CE)
Résumés of the *nask*s in *Dēnkard* Book 9 redacted and written down in Pahlavi	Late Sasanian period (*ca*. 500 CE–651 CE) to the early ʿAbbāsid period (*ca*. 750–1000 CE)
Earliest colophon of the *Dēnkard*	1020 CE in Baghdad, Iraq
Earliest extant Avestan manuscript	1323 CE in Cambay, India
Earliest extant manuscript of the *Dēnkard*	1577 CE in Kerman, Iran
Latest manuscript of the *Dēnkard*	1893 CE in Navsari, India