

A viewpoint of Iranian ethnonyms: “Kurd”, “Persian”, “Iranian”, Islam and Iranian civilization .
The current place of Iranian civilization. Ardeshir Shapuri

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Introduction

This article is written due to the sad affair of Iranian-cultural world (2009) where division and animosity has brought stagnation, weakness, suffering and backwardness.

What is the Iranian world? Just like the Arab world, the Iranian world is a place where Iranian languages, dialects and culture is prevalent. Thus this includes not only the political entities of Iran, Afghanistan, Tajikistan and autonomous Iraqi Kurdistan, but also places where Zazaki, Ossetian, Kurdish, Dari-Persian, Talyshi and etc. are spoken in Turkey, Caucasus, and Uzbekistan. For example in Turkey, there are 15-20 million Kurmanj and Zazaki speakers who are Iranians. Or in Uzbekistan, non-official and Western sources put the number of Parsi-Dari speaking Tajiks at 30-40%. In Arran (Caucasus) and Sherwan there are still some Kurds, Talysh and Tats. We should note that Iranian peoples in Turkey, Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan are severely repressed and the unity of all Iranian peoples can help in assuring their future existence.

One of the ways to bring division to the Iranian world is nation-building based upon dialects, languages and etc. Where-as everyone in the Arab world (with widely divergent dialects and languages) are called Arabs, in the Iranian world, terms such as “Persians”, “Kurds”, “Tajik” are being promoted while the underlying attachment of these terms to the greater Iranian civilization is being demoted.

Unlike the Arab world which does not have a common history, the Iranian world does share a good deal of common history including Medes, Achaemenids, Parthians, Sassanids and many post-Islamic dynasties (Buyids, Samanids, Safavids, Ghaznavids, Seljuqs (the latter three being Turkic or Turcophone but ruling mainly Iranic speaking langs)). Also it shares the same origin (Indo-Iranians) unlike the Arab world and the same mythology (exemplified in Avesta, Shahnameh and Shahnameh myths in various Iranic languages)).

For example, we start with the term Persian. The term is increasing and misleadingly being used solely for the speakers of the Parsi-Dari language. However up to the 20th century, such a usage was not common. Rather the term Persian in its general meaning simply meant Iranian. We are not concerned here with the Old Persian empire or Achaemenids. Old Persian today is a dead language. From a linguistic point of view, modern Dari-Persian is a continuation of Old Persian however this language was developed in Khorasan and Central Asia before coming back to Iran. However the term Persian since the ancient era and Islamic times became equivalent to Iranian as opposed to Turk or Arab. Just like today there are many different Chinese dialects and languages (Cantonese, Mandarin, Taiwanese and etc.), however no one doubts the underlying unity of Chinese civilization. However, due to internal strife and external pressures, Iranian

civilization has become somewhat fragmented and it is up to future Iranians to realize this and make efforts for unity while respecting internal diversity.

On the terms Iran, Iranian, Persian, Kurd, Tajik, ‘Ajam, Tat

On the term Persian

There have been several etymologies proposed for the term Persian. The most recent scholarship indicates:

{ It should not be amazing that several proposals concerning the etymology of Parsa have been put forward. In Hoffman’s eye (1940: 142) the name is related to Old Indian Parsu-, the name of warrior tribe. Eilers (1954: 188: also Harmatta 1971c: 221-222) he uses Assyrian Parsua to prove Parsa -- evolved from *Parsva-. Again Eilers (1987:49) finds another Old Indian word to explain Parsa. This time it is “Parsu”-, “rib, sickle”. More recently Skalmowski (1995:311) pointed out that Pars(u)a is the equivalent of Old Indian *parsva*, “the region of the ribs, immediate neighborhood” }

Jan Tavernier, “Iranica in the Achaemenid Period (c.a. 550-330 B.C.); lexicon of old Iranian proper names and loanwords, attested in non-Iranian texts. Volume 158 of *Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta*. Peeters Publisher, 2007. Pg 28

And the eminent Iranologist George Morgenstrieine has shown that Parsa, Pahlū, Pashtu, Parthia and etc. are all cognates of the same word.

See: Morgenstrieine, George 1973: ‘Pashto’, ‘Pathan’ and the treatment of R + sibilant in Pashto, in: *Indo-Dardica*, Wiesbaden: Reichert, 168–174.

The actual term Persian has been used for various Iranian groups and in the Islamic time, it generally meant Iranian.

Here are some examples:

A)

The Arabian historian Abu al-Hasan Ali ibn al-Husayn Al-Masudi (896-956) also refers to various Persian dialects and the speakers of these various Persian dialects as Persian. While considering modern Persian (Dari) to be one of these dialects, he also mentions Pahlavi and Old Azari (An Iranian dialect of Azerbaijan before its linguistic Turkification and probably Talyshi is

a modern descendant of that language), , as well as other Persian languages. Al-Masudi states:(Al Mas'udi, Kitab al-Tanbih wa-l-Ishraf, De Goeje, M.J. (ed.), Leiden, Brill, 1894, pp. 77-8).

Original Arabic from www.alwaraq.net: فالفرس أمة حد بلادها الجبال من الماهات وغيرها وأذربيجان إلى ما يلي بلاد أرمينية وأران والبيلقان إلى دربند وهو الباب والأبواب والري وطبرستن والمسقط والشابان وجرجان وابرشهر، وهي نيسابور، وهرات ومرو وغير ذلك من بلاد خراسان وسجستان وكرمان وفارس والأهواز، وما اتصل بذلك من أرض الأعاجم في هذا الوقت وكل هذه البلاد كانت مملكة واحدة ملكها ملك واحد ولسانها واحد، إلا أنهم كانوا يتباينون في شيء يسير من اللغات وذلك أن اللغة إنما تكون واحدة بأن تكون حروفها التي تكتب واحدة وتأليف حروفها تأليف واحد، وإن اختلفت بعد ذلك "في سائر الأشياء الأخر كالفهلوية والدرية والأذرية وغيرها من لغات الفرس".

Translation:

The Persians are a people whose borders are the Mahat Mountains and Azarbaijan up to Armenia and Arran, and Bayleqan and Darband, and Ray and Tabaristan and Masqat and Shabaran and Jorjan and Abarshahr, and that is Nishabur, and Herat and Marv and other places in land of Khorasan, and Sejistan and Kerman and Fars and Ahvaz...All these lands were once one kingdom with one sovereign and one language...although the language differed slightly. The language, however, is one, in that its letters are written the same way and used the same way in composition. There are, then, different languages such as Pahlavi, Dari, Azari, as well as other Persian languages.

B)

Khwarezmian language (an East Iranian language which is a close relative to the Avesta). For example, Abu Rayhan Biruni, a native speaker of the Eastern Iranian language Chorasmian mentions in his "Āthār al-bāqiyah 'an al-qurūn al-xāliyah" that: "the people of Khwarizm, they are a branch of the Persian tree."

Original Arabic of the quote: "و أما أهل خوارزم، و إن كانوا غصناً من دوحة الفرس" (pg 56)

C) old Tabari language. According to the Encyclopedia of Islam, the language used in the ancient Marzbannama (an important book of literature) was, in the words of the 13th-century historian and translator Sa'ad ad-Din Warawini: "the language of Ṭabaristan and old, original Persian (fārsī-yi qādīm-i bāstān)". That is Sa'ad ad-Din Warawini has called the old Iranic dialect of Tabari as Old Persian.

See: Kramers, J.H. "Marzban-nāma." Encyclopaedia of Islam. Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel and W.P. Heinrichs. Brill, 2007. Brill Online. 18 November 2007 <http://www.brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=islam_SIM-4990></ref> [[Old Azari language]]

D)The old Iranian language of Tabriz (Tabriz became predominantly Turcophone only after the mass conversion of the city from Shafii Sunnism to 12 Imam Shi'ism in the Safavid era) , being an Iranian language during the time of Qatran Tabrizi (10th century poet of Azarbaijan), was not the standard Khurasani Parsi-ye Dari. Qatran Tabrizi(11th century) has an interesting couplet mentioning this fact.

بلبل به سان مطرب بیدل فراز گل
گه پارسی نوازد، گاهی زند دری

Translation:

The nightingale is on top of the flower like a minstrel who has lost her heart

It bemoans sometimes in Parsi (Persian) and sometimes in Dari (Khurasani Persian)

See:

Mohammad-Amin Riahi. "Molehaazi darbaareyeh Zabaan-I Kohan Azerbaijan"(Some comments on the ancient language of Azerbaijan), 'Itilia' at Siyasi Magazine, volume 181-182. Also available at:

http://web.archive.org/web/*/http://www.azargoshnasp.net/languages/Azari/26.pdf

E)

Laki language and Kurdish language speakers.

Lady (Mary) Shiel in her observation of Persia during the Qajar era describes the Persian tribes and Koords/Laks identified themselves and were identified commonly as Old Persians. See: Shiel, Lady (Mary). Glimpses of Life and Manners in Persia. London: John Murray, 1856.

http://books.google.com/books/download/Glimpses_of_life_and_manners_in_Persia.pdf?id=zYZi0qSfHxoC&output=pdf&sig=ACfU3U2FxSM4IPAmAqXqmugwotcL6C8JpQ&source=gbs_v2_summary_r&cad=0

(see pg 394)

Quote:

“The PERSIAN TRIBES. The tribes are divided into three races-Toorks, Leks, Arabs. The first are the invaders from Toorkistan, who, from time immemorial, have established themselves in Persia, and who still preserve their language. The Leks form the clans of genuine Persian blood, such as the Loors, BekhtiaTees, and &c.. To them might be added the Koords, as members of the Persian family; but their numbers in the dominions of the Shah are comparatively few, the greater part of that widely-spread people being attached to Turkey. Collectively the Koords are so numerous that they might be regarded as a nation divided into distinct tribes. Who are the Leks, and who are the Koords? This inquiry I cannot solve. I never met any one in Persia, either eel (means tribe) or moolla (means religious scholar), who could give the least elucidation of this question. All they could say was, that both these races were Fools e kadeem, -- old Persians. They both speak dialects the greater part of which is Persian, bearing a strong resemblance to the colloquial language of the present day, divested of its large Arabic mixture. These dialects are not perfectly alike, though it is said that Leks and Koords are able to comprehend each other. One would be disposed to consider them as belonging to the same stock, did they not both disavow the connection. A Lek will- admit that a Koord, like himself, is an “old Persian,” but he denies that the families are identical, and a Koord views the question in the same light.

F)

Ibn Battuta, visiting Kabul in 1333 writes: “We travelled to Kabul, formerly a vast town, the site of which is now occupied by a tribe of Persians called Afghans”

Nancy Hatch Dupree at American University of Afghanistan - The Story of Kabul (Mongols

<http://www.aisk.org/aisk/NHDAHGTK05.php#Top>

Thus the term was used by travelers for Pashtuns who are a major Iranian ethno-linguistic group.

On the term Kurd

A)

Martin van Bruinessen, "The ethnic identity of the Kurds", in: Ethnic groups in the Republic of Turkey, compiled and edited by Peter Alford Andrews with Rüdiger Benninghaus [=Beihefte zum Tübinger Atlas des Vorderen Orients, Reihe B, Nr.60]. Wiesbaden: Dr. Ludwisch Reichert, 1989, pp. 613-21. excerpt: "The ethnic label "Kurd" is first encountered in Arabic sources from

the first centuries of the Islamic era; it seemed to refer to a specific variety of pastoral nomadism, and possibly to a set of political units, rather than to a linguistic group: once or twice, "Arabic Kurds" are mentioned. By the 10th century, the term appears to denote nomadic and/or transhumant groups speaking an Iranian language and mainly inhabiting the mountainous areas to the South of Lake Van and Lake Urmia, with some offshoots in the Caucasus...If there was a Kurdish speaking subjected peasantry at that time, the term was not yet used to include them."

http://www.let.uu.nl/~Martin.vanBruinessen/personal/publications/Bruinessen_Ethnic_identity_Kurds.pdf

B)

Wladimir Iwanov: "The term Kurd in the middle ages was applied to all nomads of Iranian origin". (Wladimir Ivanon, "The Gabrdi dialect spoken by the Zoroastrians of Persia", Published by G. Bardim 1940. pg 42)

C)

V. Minorsky, Encyclopedia of Islam: "We thus find that about the period of the Arab conquest a single ethnic term Kurd (plur. Akrād) was beginning to be applied to an amalgamation of Iranian or iranicised tribes., "Kurds" in Encyclopaedia of Islam". Edited by: P. Bearman , Th. Bianquis , C.E. Bosworth , E. van Donzel and W.P. Heinrichs. Brill, 2007. Brill Online. accessed 2007.

D)

David Mackenzie: "If we take a leap forward to the Arab conquest we find that the name Kurd has taken a new meaning becoming practically synonymous with 'nomad', if nothing more pejorative" D.N. Mackenzie, "The Origin of Kurdish", Transactions of Philological Society, 1961, pp 68-86

E)

John Limbert, The Origins and Appearance of the Kurds in Pre-Islamic Iran, Iranian Studies, Vol. 1, No. 2, Spring 1968. excerpt:

{The "Kurds" of Fars

The Arab and Persian historians who wrote during the early centuries of Islam frequently mentioned Kurds living outside of

Kurdestan, especially in Fars. According to these histories, the Kurds had lived in many places outside of Kurdestan in Sassanian

times. The historians Mas'udi and Istakhri, writing in the middle of the tenth century A. D., tell of Kurds living in Kerman, Sistan,

Khorasan, and Fars as well as in Kurdistan proper. Rashid Yasami believes that the Kurds' original home was Fars. He cites as evidence the Persian historian Beihaqi (c. 1000 A.D.).

Each reason and area has something associated with it: the wise men of Greece, the painters of China...and the Kurds (akrad) of Fars.

According to Yasami, not only were the Kurds of Fars a major support of Sassanian power, but Ardashir I, the founder of the empire, was himself a Kurd. He says that Sasan, Ardashir's grandfather, married Ram Behesht of the Bazanjan Kurds, who, according to Istakhri, were one of the five Kurdish tribes of Fars. Their son Pgpak took advantage of his Kurdish connections and sent his son Ardashir as governor to Darabgerd (Darab), which was the center of the Chupanan, or Shab5nk5reh, the large federation of tribes to which the Banzanjan belonged and who had been Sasan's original protectors. These same Kurds of Fars now became Ardashir's supporters in his revolt against Ardavan V, the Arsacid ruler. After Ardashir had proclaimed himself king of kings, Ardavan wrote an insulting letter to him which called attention to Ardashir's Kurdish ancestry.

You've bitten off more than you can chew and you have brought death to yourself. O son of a Kurd, raised in the tents of the Kurds, who gave you permission to put a crown on your head?

However, not all Kurds supported Ardashir. Both the Shahnameh and the Karnamak-e-Ardashir tell of Ardashir's defeat by and eventual conquest of the Kurds. In the Shahnameh account Ardashir wars with the Kurds before subduing the neighboring areas of Kerman and Sistan-- therefore the reference is probably to the Kurds of Fars. But in the Karnamak account Ardashir makes war on the Kurds of the land of Masi, which the translator and editor, Sadeq Hedayat, interprets as Madi, an area in Kurdistan.

Although it is possible that the Kurds of Fars are related to the tribes of Kurdistan, it is more likely that the groups are distinct and that the tribes of Fars are not true Kurds, but Iranian tribes speaking southwest Iranian dialects, perhaps related to modern Luri. Such southwest dialects as Luri and Bakhtiari are much more closely related to Persian than to Kurdish. If we reconstruct the ancient linguistic division, then the Kurds of the north spoke a language related to Median-- that is, northwest Iranian, and the "Kurds" of the south spoke a language related to Persian, or southwest Iranian. Of course it is impossible to prove that the tribes of Fars were not true Kurds; they might have been. But before the beginning of the twentieth century, no basic distinction was recognized between Kurdish and Luri.⁸ Only recently have these two languages been found to follow the N.W.-S.W. or Mede-Persian division. Furthermore, there is simply no trace of Kurdish speakers at present either in Fars or on its borders. One of Istakhri's five Kurdish tribes

of Fars is the Jiloya; at present there is a Lur tribe in the same area with the name Kuh-Giluyeh, whose origin and whose time of coming to Fars are unknown. Most conclusive of all is the fact that Kurd in the older Persian or Arab sense meant simply nomad with no particular ethnic connotations. In this case, Ardavan V's letter becomes more insulting, since in effect he is calling Ardashir an ignorant nomad. The term was not even restricted to Iranian nomads—according to a tenth century work, the Persians called the Mesopotamian Arabs the "Kurds of Suristan." Thus it is reasonable (but hardly certain) that the so-called Kurds of Fars of Sassanian times were not true Kurds at all, but were Iranian nomads speaking dialects related to Persian. }

F)

According to Vladimir Minorsky:

“The vague and indiscriminate use of the term *Kurd* goes back to early times. According to Hamza Isfahani (*circa* 350/961), ed. Berlin, 151, “The Persians used to call the Daylamites ‘The Kurds of Tabaristan’, as they used to call Arabs ‘the Kurds of Suristan’, i.e. of ‘Iraq’. Other Arab and Persian authors of the tenth century A.D. mean by Kurd any Iranian nomads of Western Persia, such as the tent dwellers of Fars.

The famous historian of the Kurdish nation Sharaf Khan states in his *Annals*, p. 13, that there are four divisions of Kurds: Kurmanj, Lur, Kalhur, and Guran. This enumeration gives a clear idea of the main groups of the Iranian mountaineers, but only the Kurmanj, and possibly Kalhur, come under the heading *Kurd*, whereas the Lur and Guran stand apart, both for linguistic and ethnological reasons”

Source:

“The Guran”, Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, Volume, XI, 1943-1946, PP. 75-103.

G)

Richard Frye, "The Golden age of Persia", Phoenix Press, 1975. Second Impression December 2003. pp 111: "Tribes always have been a feature of Persian history, but the sources are extremely scant in reference to them since they did not 'make' history. The general designation 'Kurd' is found in many Arabic sources, as well as in Pahlavi book on the deeds of Ardashir the first Sassanian ruler, for all nomads no matter whether they were linguistically connected to the Kurds of today or not. The population of Luristan, for example, was considered to be Kurdish, as were tribes in Kuhistan and Baluchis in Kirman"

So in conclusion the term Kurds denoted Iranian groups who lived a particular lifestyle.

Ajam, Tat, Tajik

Ajam

The term Ajam at first meant non-Arab in the Arabic language, but due to large interactions between Iranians and Arabs, the term became synonymous with Iranian. However after the formation of the Safavid empire, the term came to take a more geographic meaning and the Ottomans called all the inhabitants of the Safavid empire as Ajam.

Interestingly enough, the Sunni Kurdish population calls the Azeri population, Kurdish population of Southern Iran and also all other Iranian speaking Shi'ites as 'Ajam.

See: Mahmood Reza Ghods, *A comparative historical study of the causes, development and effects of the revolutionary movements in northern Iran in 1920-21 and 1945-46*. University of Denver, 1988. v.1, p.75.

And

See also: Encyclopedia Iranica, "Ajam", Bosworth

<http://www.iranica.com/newsite/articles/unicode/v1f7/v1f7a028.html>

In Persian poetry, the term 'Ajam has been used as a self-designation for Iranians by Iranians, but it never gained wide popularity as Iranian. However Iranian poets such as Khaqani Sherwani are called "Hessan al-Ajam" (the Persian Hessian, where Hessian was a famous Arab poet before Islam).

Thus we can say the term Ajam was used by Arabs at first for all non-Arabs. During the Islamic era, it came to be a designation of Iranians in general by the Arabs. Eventually some Iranians adopted this name and the term Ajam took a geographical role. During the Ottoman-Safavid era, the term Ajam due to its geographical role also took a religious definition. That is why Sunni Kurmanji speakers refer to Azerbaijani Turkic speakers as 'Ajam but do not use this for the Sunni Turkic speakers of Turkey. Today, the term is used by Arabs in Khuzestan and Iraq to refer to all Iranian speakers of the area. Also Iranians in Bahrain use this as a self-designation.

Tat

The term Tat was used by Turks for Iranians just like the term Ajam was used by Arabs. Primarily, the Turks came into contact with speakers of Chorasmian, Soghdian and Dari-Persian and these are referred to as Tat in Turkish. One theory is that the word "Tat" means settled since the Turks were mainly nomadic. Today the term Tat is used as a self-designation for some Iranians in the Caucasus as well as Iranian speakers that live in East Azerbaijan province, Zanjan, and Western Azerbaijan. Also in Northern Khorasan as well. These dialects are not exactly the same, however the self-designation Tat came due to contact with Turkic speakers.

In the Dekhoda dictionary, which referenced the Qamus-i Turki by Shams al-Din Sami, the Turkish author states: "The Turks called all Iranians (he means it as Persian speakers) and Kurds under their control as Tats".

Thus the designation Tat was used for Sogdians first and then other people that Turks came into contact with. Today isolated pockets of Iranian peoples with various Iranian dialects who live in close proximity to Turkish speakers have adopted the name Tat as a self-designation.

Tajik

Svatopluk Soucek, "A history of inner Asia", Cambridge University Press, 2000. pg 32: "The origin and history of the ethnonym Tajik goes back to the name of an Arab tribe, Tayy, who lived in the Iraqi confines of the last pre-Islamic Persian empire, that of the Sassanians. The Persians extended this name to Arabs in general, and the Sogdians followed their example. After the conquest of Central Asia by Muslims, not only Arabs but also increasing number of Persians and Sogdians professed the new religion, and all of these came to be compromised under the ethnonym "Tajik". Eventually the Persian-speaking converts outnumbered the Arabs, and the ethnonym which had been the name of an Arab tribe ended up being reserved for Persian-speaking Muslims of Central Asia and their language"

Today the name Tajik is used as a self-designation for speakers of Dari-Persian, Yaghnobi, Rushni, Wakhni and several other Eastern Iranian languages. The Iranian speakers of China who also speak East Iranian also refer to themselves as Tajik. It is likely again that due to contact with the Turkic population, the Iranians were called Tajiks and eventually they adopted this name in that area.

Iranian (Arya) and Iran

The term Arya has been used as self designation for Medes, Persians, Parthians, Bactrians, Sogdians and etc. We provide some examples here:

A)

"the Medes were called anciently by all people Aryan" (Herodotus, 7.62)

B)

The term "Ariya" appears in the royal inscriptions in three different contexts: As the name of the language of the Old Persian version of the inscription of Darius the Great in Behistun; as the ethnic background of Darius in inscriptions at Naqsh-e-Rostam and Susa (Dna, Dse) and Xerxes in the inscription from Persepolis (Xph) and as the definition of the God of Arya people, Ahuramazda, in the Elamite version of the Behistun inscription. For example in the Dna and Dse Darius and Xerxes describe themselves as "An Achaemenian, A Persian son of a Persian and an Aryan, of Aryan stock".

See Arya, and Aryan in Encyclopedia Iranica for further information.

Note that first they describe their clan (Achaemenid) and then tribe/group (Persian) and then their ethnicity Arya. So here we have good references that both the Medes and Persians referred to themselves as Aryans. The Medes and Persians were people of western Iranian stock. Western Iranian languages and dialects including Kurdish, Persian, Baluchi have their roots in the Old Persian and Median languages and are prevalent languages of Iran today.

C)

The OP inscriptions date back approximately to 400-500 B.C. Concurrently, or even prior to Old Persian, the word Airya is abundant used in the *Avesta* and related Zoroastrian literature whose origin lies with the eastern Iranian people.

The Avestan *airya* always has an ethnic value. It appears in Yasht literature and in the *Wideewdaad*. The land of Aryans is described as *Airyana Vaejah* in *Avesta* and in the Pahlavi inscription as *Eran-wez*. The *Avesta* archer Arash (Arash-e-Kamangir) is called the hero of *Airya* people. Zoroaster himself is described from the Airya people. The examples of the ethnic name of Airya in *Avesta* are too many to enumerate here and the interested reader is referred to the following site: www.avesta.org

D)

The ostraca (an inscribed potsherd) from Parthian Nisa time period (approx. 2100 years ago) provides us with numerous Parthian names related. Parthian, like Persian, is a Western Iranian language. Some of the names of the people at that time that begin with prefix Arya are given by:

Aryabaam-Aryabaanuk, Aryabarzan- Aryabozhan- Aryaxshahrak- Aryanistak- Aryafriyaanak- Aryasaaxt- Aryazan

The etymology of such names is fairly known. For the attestation of these names see:

Parthian Economic Documents from Nisa (1976-1980)

In: MacKenzie, D. N. (ed.), *Corpus inscriptionum Iranicarum*, Pt 2. Inscriptions of the Seleucid and Parthian periods and of Eastern Iran and Central Asia. v. 2. Parthian London: P. Lund, Humphries, 1976

Contents:

Pt. 2. Inscriptions of the Seleucid and Parthian periods and of Eastern Iran and Central Asia.

-- v. 2. Parthian.

[no. 1] Parthian economic documents from Nisa: Plates I (123 b/w plates, 1976).

[no. 2] Parthian economic documents from Nisa: Plates II (124-330 = 206 b/w plates, 1977).

[no. 3] Parthian economic documents from Nisa: Plates III (1979).

[no. 4] Parthian economic documents from Nisa: Texts I (1977).

E)

Moses of Khorenat's the Armenian historian of 5th century A.D. also denotes the Parthians, Medes and Persians collectively as Aryans. So ancient neighboring people have consistently referred to Iranians as Aryans. Both Armenian and Greeks are Indo-Europeans but only Indo-Iranians have been known as Aryans throughout history.

R.W. Thomson. *History of Armenians* by Moses Khorenat'si. Harvard University Press, 1978.

F)

Ardeshir the first, the founder of the Sassanid dynasty, on the coins minted during his era describes himself as "Shahan shah Aryan" (Iran). Where Aryan exactly means the "land of the Arya" which is synonymous with land of Iranians. His son Shapur, whose triumphs over his enemies are the stuff of legends minted coins with the inscription: "Shahan shah aryan ud anaryan" (The king of Kings of Iran and Non-Iran). The reason for *anaryan* is that he expanded the empire beyond the Aryan lands.

The trilingual inscription erected by his command gives us a more clear description. The languages used are Parthian, Middle Persian and Greek. In Greek the inscription says: "ego ... tou Arianon ethnous despotes eimi" which translates to "I am the king of the Aryans". In the Middle Persian Shapour says: "I am the Lord of the EranShahr" and in Parthian he says: "I am the Lord of AryanShahr". Both AryanShahr/EranShahr here denote the country of Iran.

G)

The Bactrian inscription of Kanishka the founder of the Kushan empire at Rabatak, which was discovered in 1993 in an unexcavated site in the Afghanistan province of Baghlan clearly refers to this Eastern Iranian language as Arya. Interestingly enough, Bactrian (approximate area surrounding modern Balkh) was written using Greek alphabets.

What is interesting is that both Dariush the Great and Kanishka refer to the Iranian language as the "Aryan" language. One is in Old Persian and the other is an eastern Iranian language called Bactrian.

See:

N. Sims-Williams. "Further notes on the Bactrian inscription of Rabatak, with an Appendix on the names of Kujula Kadphises and Vima Taktu in Chinese" Proceedings of the Third European Conference of Iranian Studies (Cambridge, September 1995), Part 1: *Old and Middle Iranian Studies*, N. Sim-Williams, ed. Wiesbaden, pp. 79-92.

H)

The Alans

See V.I. Ahev, the "Alans" in Encyclopedia Iranica

<http://www.iranica.com/newsite/index.isc?Article=http://www.iranica.com/newsite/articles/unicode/v1f8/v1f8a013.html>

"The name "Alan" is derived from Old Iranian *arya-, "Aryan," and so is cognate with "Īrān" (from the gen. plur. *aryānām)."

I)

Strabo in his Geography mentions the affinity of various Iranian/Aryan groups:

"The name of Ariana is further extended to a part of Persia and of Media, as also to the Bactrians and Sogdians on the north; for these speak approximately the same language, with but slight variation. (Geography, 15.8)

This is probably the oldest attestation to the name Iran (Ariana) mentioned by Strabo, a Greek historian living in the first century B.C.. Probably the name was used even before this, but Strabo gives us the first attestation as a concrete land outside of the Avesta.

We can see the name Iran/Arya, Iranshahr/Aryashahr used in Middle Persian (Sassanid inscriptions). After Islam, the name Iran has been continuously in use. For example Rudaki, Ferdowsi, Nezami Ganjavi, Hakim Meysari, Khaqani, Qatran, Hamdullah Mostowfi, Tarikh-i Sistan, Yaqut, and etc. all have used this.

See:

Matini, J. (1992). Iran dar gozasht-e ruzegaaran [Iran in the Passage of Times], Majalle-ye Iranshenasi [Iranshenasi: A Journal of Iranian Studies] 4(2):

Hamza Isfahani ties the name Arya and Persia together in one sentence:

“Arian which is also Persia is situation in the middle of these six countries and these six countries form its borders. Its SE is China, its North is bordered by the lands of Turk, Its Southern Middle borders India, Its Northern Middle borders Byzantium, its SW borders Africa and its NW is in the hand of Berbers”

See:

Hamza Isfahani, Tarikh Payaambaraan o Shaahaan, translated by Jaf'ar Shu'ar, Tehran: Intishaaraat Amir Kabir, 1988.

And in old Gurani literature, the name Iran is mentioned:

Aw Wātay yārān, aw wātay yārān

êma dêwānayan aw wātay yārān

hanī magēllīn yak yaki shārān

tā zīnda karīm āīni êran

Based on the saying of dear friends

We should act in a way that does give us away (crazy)

So that we may go out one by one in the cities

So that way may rekindle the faith of Iran

See. Sadiq Safizadeh, “Doreh Bohlul”, Khuseh, 1363 (Solar Hejri Calendar).

The name is also mentioned many times in the Leki Shahnameh which was recently produced by Dr. Izadpanah.

Religion, Islam, Zoroastrianism and Iranian culture and the wasteful and mindless wandering “Intellectuals”

Our intention here is to write very little about this complex problem. But recently, there has been some “intellectuals” who are doing a disfavor to Iranian civilization but trying to dissect its various aspects and set them against each other. Mainly, these “intellectuals” try to disown the pre-Islamic or post-Islamic aspects of Iranian civilization. We will focus on four important

points: 1) Religion in general with respect to Iranian civilization. 2) Was Zoroastrianism or Islam forceful or by peaceful conversion or both? 3) Iranian contribution to Islamic civilization as a source of pride. 4) Future of religion in general

Religion in general with respect to Iranian civilization.

One of the oldest form of religious manifestation in Iranian culture is the inscription of Darius the Great. It is very likely that these lines up to the point where Darius is named are not the words of Darius I himself but rather taken from Zoroastrian religious hymns of his own time. The inscription states:

A great god is Ahuramazda, who created this earth, who created yonder sky, who created man, who created happiness for man, who made Darius king, one king of many, one lord of many.

Thus monotheism was part of Iranian civilization at least 2500 years ago. Overall, the belief of one God who is the creator has been the prevalent core of Iranian civilization and one of its most important pillars. That is many aspects of Iranian thought specially up to the modern secular are governed by the fact that there is one God who is the created, who created man, who created happiness for man, who placed him on Earth in order so that he may know God.

Thus the most important function of the messengers (Zoroaster or Muhammad or Jesus or Abraham) is to teach about one God. The second most important aspect of religion is to teach man about respecting the rights of others and by respecting the rights of others, man is able to find salvation. With this respect, both Islam and Zoroastrianism are divine religions ordained by God and the most important aspect, which is belief in one God, the golden rule and honesty, integrity, purity, helping others and etc. are shared by both. Of course both Islam and Zoroastrianism developed many sects with many different beliefs and etc. But what we have described is the essential core. The belief in one God who is the creator is the essential core.

As per evil, various theories developed in Islamic and Zoroastrianism sects. But we should note that Humans within themselves have both a divine aspect and an animalistic aspect. If the animalistic aspects takes control, then humans become no different than primates. However if through the will of the intellect and divine favors, Man is able to overcome his animalistic desires (part of it which is respect the rights of his fellow man), then he has guaranteed himself salvation. With this regard, evil stems from the lack of Good and from not following the principles set down by the divine religions.

So in essence, real religion in general and also with respect to Iranian civilization is: 1) Belief in one God. 2) respecting the rights of fellow human beings through various social conventions and laws. It should be noted some of the external forms of these social conventions and laws were brought for their own time and they will need reinterpretation to adjust them for modern times. 3) overcoming the animalistic nature within ourselves.

Of course thousands of pages have been written on this subject, but our aim was to show that in their essence, there is no real difference between say Zoroastrianism, Islam , Christianity or Judaism as the core principles are the same and famous Iranian mystics have already reached this conclusion

Conversions

With regards to conversions of Iranian peoples to Zoroastrianism or Islam, one cannot say that it was purely peaceful or purely through force. For example:

In Zoroastrianism, the king Vishtasp converted peacefully, however the wars with the other Iranian tribes in early Zoroastrian lore is an aspect of religious difference.

Xerxes in the Old Persian inscription state:

“And among these countries there was (a place) where previously false gods [[Daevas]] were worshipped. Afterwards, by the favor of Ahuramazda, I destroyed that sanctuary of the demons, and I made proclamation, "The demons shall not be worshipped!" Where previously the demons were worshipped, there I worshipped Ahuramazda and Arta [[Asha]] reverent(ly).”

The priest Kartir in the Kabayeh Zardosht inscription states:

<http://www.avesta.org/mp/kz.html>

“And in kingdom after kingdom and place after place throughout the whole empire the services of Ahura Mazda and the Yazads became preeminent, and great dignity came to the Mazdayasnian religion and the magi in the empire, and the Yazads and water and fire and small cattle in the empire attained great satisfaction, while Ahriman and the devs were punished and rebuked, and the teachings of Ahriman and the devs departed from the empire and were abandoned. And Jews, Sramans (Buddhists), (10) Brahmins, Nasoreans (Orthodox Christians), (Gnostic) Christians, Maktak (Baptisers), and Zandiks (Manichaeans) in the empire were smitten, and destruction of idols and scattering of the stores of the devs and god-seats and nests was abandoned.”

Thus one has to admit that an unbiased viewpoint is that Zoroastrianism as a religion came through both peaceful conversions (as the example of Zoroaster and Vishtasp’s court) as well as through the expansion (often forceful) of Zoroastrian Kings and monarchs.

The issue is somewhat covered by Elton Daniel here:

<http://www.iranica.com/newsite/index.isc?Article=http://www.iranica.com/newsite/articles/unicode/v6f3/v6f3a001.html>

“The process of converting Iranians to Islam commenced in Arabia itself, where numerous people of Persian origin were resident, probably as a consequence of Sasanian involvement in Yemen. Ṭabarī (I, pp. 1778-81) gave the names of several individuals said to be of Persian ancestry among the freedmen (*mawālī*) of the Prophet Moḥammad. According to tradition, the first and most important of them was Salmān Fārsī, who became the prototype of Persian converts and the symbol of the role that Persia and Persians would play in the future of Islam.”

And

“It is difficult to be precise about the motives or forces that facilitated the conversion of the Iranian population to Islam. The notion that coercion was a significant factor in producing conversions to Islam has been generally discredited (Arnold, p. 5). Virtually all the purported texts of treaties with conquered Persian cities contain guarantees of protection for the existing religious communities and for the free exercise of their customary religions (e.g., Ṭabarī, I, pp. 2641, 2655-62). There may, however, have been sporadic use of force, not so much to compel conversions as to weaken the hold of Zoroastrianism over the population. For example, both Muslim and non-Muslim authors alluded to the execution of Zoroastrian priests, the destruction of fire temples, and the burning of Zoroastrian texts in K̲vārazm (Balāḍorī, *Fotūḥ*, p. 421; Bīrūnī, *Āṭār*, p. 35); orders for similar actions were sent to Sīstān but apparently were not implemented (*Tārīḳ-e Sīstān*, pp. 92-94). As the Zoroastrian establishment had already been weakened by popular discontent as manifested in Mazdakite upheavals and the spread of Christianity and Buddhism in the late Sasanian period, even limited Muslim attacks on the clergy and temples may have helped to create a religious vacuum, which Islam gradually filled. It is also likely that many of the men, women, and children taken captive during the wars of conquest converted under a certain amount of duress or at least an implied threat of force; the best example is the story of the Persian commander Hormozān’s conversion to avoid execution (Ṭabarī, I, p. 2560). In any case, social and economic considerations were much more important than coercion in producing significant numbers of conversions.”

So what can we say? During the time of the Prophet Muhammad, there were Iranians who converted voluntarily in Islam. It should be noted that history has shown all the wars of the Prophet Muhammad were defensive in nature. That is it was the pagan Arabs who attacked the Muslims first. At the time of Umar, Muslim armies expanded and even defeated China in Central Asia, defeated the Byzantium empire and also defeated Sassanid Iran.

However several important things should be noted:

- 1) Most of the Sassanid royal family who fled to China according to the records had already converted to Nestorian Christianity and a noticeable part of the Iranian population were not necessarily practitioners of various sects of Zoroastrianism.

- 2) Before the incursion of the Arab armies into Persia, there were peaceful converts to Islam.
- 3) The Arab invaders (due to their own culture) were brutal in many respects (like most conquerors anywhere). However, the conversion of Iranians to Islam was not overnight. As an example: “However, in some regions, such as Fārs province, a Sasanian center of the faith, there remained a large number of Zoroastrians (see Moqaddasi, p. 429), so that Abu Eshāq Kāzaruni (q.v.; b. 963), the eponymous founder of the Kāzaruniya order of Sufis, could claim, according to a well-known and extensive hagiographical account of him, to have brought about mass conversions of Zoroastrians in Fārs in the late 10th century (see Yavari, pp. 242-43).”
<http://www.iranica.com/newsite/index.isc?Article=http://www.iranica.com/newsite/articles/unicode/v13f3/v13f3001a.html>
Encyclopedia Iranica, "Iran in the Islamic Period (651–1980s)", E. Yarshater.

Thus we can say that both Zoroastrianism and Islam became dominant religions through a variety of means. The idea that Iranians were forced to accept Islam by the absolute sword however does not fit with reality of historical sources. A study of conversion to various other religions (say Christianity in Europe, Anatolia, American continent) and etc. should yield the same mixed picture.

Iranian contribution to Islam

Ibn Khaldun, the Arabic historians writes:

“ It is a remarkable fact that, with few exceptions, most Muslim scholars both in the religious and intellectual sciences have been non-Arabs ... Thus the founders of grammar were Sibawaih and, after him, al-Farisi and az-Zajjaj. All of whom were of Iranian descent. They were brought up in the Arabic language and acquired knowledge of it through their upbringing and through contact with Arabs. They invented the rules [of grammar] and made it into a discipline for later generations. Most of the hadith scholars, who preserved traditions of the Prophet for the Muslims also were Persians, or Persian in language and breeding because the discipline was widely cultivated in Iraq and regions beyond. Furthermore, all the great jurists were Iranians, as is well-known. The same applies to speculative theologians and to most of the Qu'ran commentators. Only the Iranians engaged in the task of preserving knowledge and writing systematic scholarly works. Thus the truth of the statement of the Prophet becomes apparent, If learning were suspended at the highest parts of heaven the Persians would attain it... This situation continued in the cities as long as the Iranian and Iranian countries, the 'Iraq, Khurasan, and Transoxiana, retained their sedentary culture.

Quoted in “The Golden age of Persi”a by Richard N. Frye, Professor of Iranian, Harvard university Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London 1975 Professor Richard (Emeritus) was a Professor of Iranian and Middle Eastern studies at Harvard University. pp. 161-162. Quote: “The remarks of Ibn Khaldun are not

in dispute". The Muqaddimah By Ibn Khaldūn translated by Franz Rosenthal, N. J. Dawood, Published by Princeton University Press, 1969. pp. 429-430.

Thus when Islam came to Iran, Iranians adopted many aspect of it to their own culture. Furthermore, one can consider Khorasanian Sufism as an Aryan interpretation of Islam.

In short there is no disharmony between Iranian concept Islam and Iranian civilization and "intellectuals" who waste time in trying to disassociate the two are actually erasing a major portion of Iranian civilization's contribution. As shown below, with the modern era and internet age, religion itself is going to lose many of its traditional features and the main point (from this author's perspective) is that Iranians should always be aware of God and communicate with him in whatever form or fashion they desire.

Religion in the future

With the advent of the modern style, we can probably expect that religion as a whole will be transformed. That is many of its ritualistic aspects will eventually disappear and one will probably see more concentration on the creator rather than religion itself. The main concentration will still remain the same, which is Man's understanding of his creator and his place in the universe. So religious fanaticisms will probably not have a future in the long term as the two essential points are realized: 1) All divine religions have the divine mission of making man aware of his creator. 2) The laws setup by prophet (even if some were for their age) are meant to protect the rights of human beings and progress their souls.

From the perspective of this article, both Islam (and specially Sufism) and Zoroastrianism have left their marks on Iranian civilization however in the long term future, religion will probably lose many of its exoteric aspects and its essential point which are of the main concern will come to the forefront: 1) belief in one God. 2) the destiny of the soul 3) protecting and respecting the rights of fellow human beings. We can expect these issues to take more rational approaches (as possible) as civilization as a whole moves towards rational thinking.

Unity today for a Better Tomorrow

Today what we can consider the Iranian civilization of humanity has some internal and external problems. We do not need to enumerate the internal problems but a major one is that of the clash with modernity which still has not been solved. That is while Iranian civilization needs to keep its moral behavior (derived from divine religions), it also needs to harmonize aspects of modern Western civilization which are compatible with its own culture, while at the same time not accepting those that are not. As per external pressures, we can for example note the situation of

Iranian minorities in various countries who are oppressed as a whole due to ultra-nationalism being the form of government in those countries (say in Turkey or Uzbekistan or the situation of minorities such as Talysh or Kurds in Arran and Sherwan).

As per the terms Persian, Kurd, Iranian, Ajam, Tat and etc. All of these show that the term Iranian is the most authentic and encompassing term for all Iranian groups. It covers basically all Iranian speakers : Eastern and Western in both antiquity and also today. Other terms like Persian, Kurd and etc. have denoted various groups at various times and to confine these terms to a section of Iranian people today seems to be a very recent phenomenon (20th century) and does not have any historical basis. For example, if Tabari is called Old Persian, or Lak and Kurds are called Old Persians, or Khwarizmian language is called Persian, then one cannot just confine this term for speakers of one Iranian language: Dari-Persian. Similarly is the term Kurd, which has been used for variety of Iranian languages like Daylamites (probable ancestors of today's Zaza speakers), Baluchs, Laks, Lurs, Sorani speakers, Kurmanji speakers, and etc. In reality, in the Islamic Medieval ages, this term was used for all Iranian nomads and semi-nomads. Today we can see that the Arabs despite having dialects which are not mutually intelligible or the Chinese having dialects that are not mutually intelligible are considered one civilization. Even though the case of the Arabs are weak, the case of the Chinese is strong and numerous dialects do not hinder the way. With this regard, all Iranian peoples and groups are part of the same civilization despite the diversity that has come through various internal and external contacts and isolations. There are various unions and major countries such as China, India, European Unions, United States, Russia and etc. are making headway for the future. If Iranian peoples who belong to the Iranian civilization also work together and unite (and note we showed various labels that are used today did not denote a single Iranian dialect or language), it is this author's opinion that they can also be a major factor in ensuring the progress of humanity. That is an European Union or a United State model can work well that will protect both Iranian civilization externally while also respecting internal diversity. Such union can also make Iranian civilization a powerhouse for the 21st century so that it will not be dominated by various powers or even neighbors.

However if Iranians become divided and fragmented, then various neighbors or groups will impose their hegemony as they have done in the past. Also the efforts that try to dissect various aspects Iranian civilizations instead of embracing it not only generate a waste of time, but also in the end accomplishes nothing. That is why we stated clearly that both the Islamic, Zoroastrian aspects of Iranian civilization needs to be embraced while at the same time, a concordance between Iranian civilization and positive aspects of Western civilization should be harmonized.

Current Situation

The current situation shows that Kurmanj Iranians, Zaza Iranians, Talysh Iranians, Tajik Iranians are being oppressed by various pan-Turkist governments (Turkey, Arran (republic of Azerbaijan), Uzbekistan). Also the countries of Turkey and Azerbaijan are posing a existential threat to Armenia and Armenians. Despite the Armenian genocide (we should note that constant

nomadic invasions by Turks brought much destruction to Iranian peoples for example most of the Mongol Troops were of Turkic origins and eventually after the Mongol invasion places like Chorasmia, Aran, Azerbaijan, Sogdiana lost much of their Iranian population), the country Armenia and Armenian culture has managed to survive but its land has been significantly reduced. So in a way we should consider Armenians as part of the Iranian world as they not only have a significant Iranian influence but also their interests lie with that of the Iranian world. Lands of Armenia/Kurdistan also historically overlap and belong to both Armenians and Kurds. The past prejudices must be removed in order for Iranians and Iranian-oriented nations like Armenia to cooperate. Given the current challenge that pan-Turkism is trying to pose to Iranian national unity, it might be prudent that once there is a national Iranian government, Iran (the current entity), Kurds, Armenians sit at one side of the table and negotiate with pan-Turkist regimes for land exchanges. For example the Kurdistan of Turkey or parts of historical Armenia can be exchanged for places in current Iran that might tend to pan-Turkism and Turkish nationalism. This way by defining a clear border between Iranians (Armenians too) and the Turks, an Iranian union can prosper without any internal threat. The same can be said of Turks who would be happy to change their Kurds for pan-Turkic oriented people (for example some Turcophones in Iran who have turned their back on their Iranian heritage) that live in Iran. But only through unity of all Iranians/Armenians can Iran/Armenia gain their rights. Also if the Turkic entities continue to pose a threat to Iranian/Armenian interests, Iran/Armenia have other allies like China, Russia and etc. who do not think highly of pan-Turkism. Also this call for Iranian unity does not mean any sort of chauvinism but simply a defensive self-preservation in the face of various anti-Iranian ideologies like pan-Turkism. For example a look at history shows that the mingling of Turks and Iranians although had its positive aspect also presented its own hostilities. Indeed the population or land exchange of Iranian people in Turkey, Arran, Uzbekistan and Turkic people in Iran, Kurdistan, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Armenia would bring stability for both civilizations (Iranian and Turks).

Also we should not overlook some misconceptions due to history. For example some groups might bring the difference between the Pahlavids (who were Mazandarani Iranian) and Qazi Mohammad and try to make a big issue of this. We should note that neither Pahlavids represented the interest of all Iranians nor was Qazi Mohammad 100% independent of USSR. Also such discussions will not help any Iranians today. Those issues (which will not make the situation of Iranians any better or worse) need to be analyzed without bias and the actions of some politicians do not represent a whole group, but they should not hide the fact that if Iranians do not unite, they will all be losers. So all Iranian groups need to be understanding and strive for unity. In one sentence, in order for Iranian peoples to prosper they need to have a unified voice and vision of a political union which respects diversity but also cherishes their shared Iranian heritage. Else having several weak Iranian countries or the erasing of Iranian peoples (as it continues today in Turkey, Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan) is to the detriment of all Iranian peoples.

In the end this article is written by a human and can have mistakes. But it is hoped that its main ideas are studied by Iranic peoples and its main idea is unity for a future political block (whether at the level of EU, US or whatever is deemed best) in order to ensure that the Iranian world can stand to the economic and political challenges of the future. Together Iranian peoples are strong but disunited, they will be pushed around by others (like Turks, Arabs) or will not meet the future economic challenges (China, USA, India..).