

The Zoroastrian Priests and the Foreign Affairs of Sasanian Iran and the Later Roman Empire (5th Cent.)*

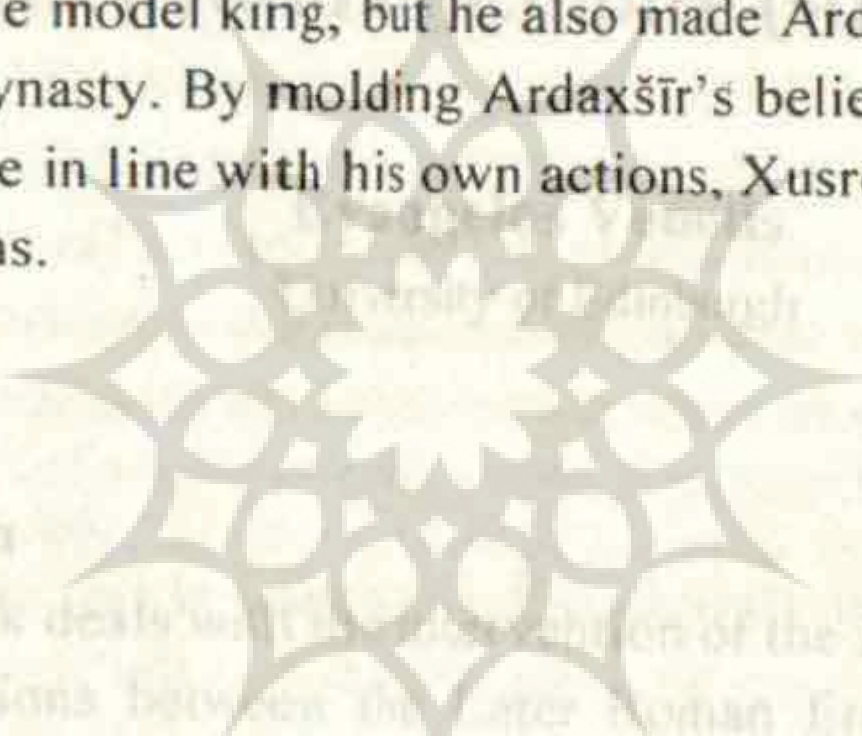
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I. Introduction

The present work deals with the intervention of the Zoroastrian priests in the diplomatic relations between the Later Roman Empire and Sasanian Iran during the 5th century. This intervention is closely associated with the struggle of the Zoroastrian priesthood with the Christians communities in the fifth century. Although this was a peaceful period for the relations of the two empires, the religious struggle of the Zoroastrian priests with the Christians of the Sasanian Empire and Armenia was present throughout the century. This struggle, besides its religious nature, had a strong political dimension and was used as a means of diplomacy and political pressure on the Sasanian Empire as well as on its foreign relations with the Romans. Unlike the role of Christian bishops in diplomatic missions, there is no evidence of a direct involvement of the Zoroastrian priests in diplomatic procedures. Their involvement is indirect and their political influence is

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Ardaxšīr ī Pābagān and constructed an image of Ardaxšīr which was in fact Xusrō's own view and vision of how it must have been in the beginning. In the foot steps of Ardaxšīr I, Xusrō I did the same in the 6th century AD for Ērānšahr. He also commissioned the writing of an official history of the Ērānšahr which was in line with his policies and aims,³⁸ and may have finalized the *Avesta*, and certainly circumvented the further interpretation of the text. By incorporating foreign learnings, Xusrō I was able to bring a period in the history of the Sasanian empire which became synonymous with grandeur and the zenith of the empire. He reconstructed the memory of Ardaxšīr I to justify his actions in a turbulent time in the history of Ērānšahr. Xusrō I was the model king, but he also made Ardaxšīr I one of the greatest kings of the dynasty. By molding Ardaxšīr's beliefs, actions and attitude to coincide and be in line with his own actions, Xusrō I attempted to legitimize his own reforms.



1. Introduction

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In the zand of the Wahman Yasn and of the Hordād Yasn and of the Aštād Yasn it is revealed that once the accursed Mazdak son of Bāmdād, the adversary of the religion, appeared. And (his followers) brought detriment to the religion of the yazads. And Husraw of immortal soul, son of Kawād summoned before him Māhdād, Šābuhr of Dādohrmazd, Dastur of Ādurbādagān, Ādur Farrbay the honest, Ādurbād of Ādurmihr, and Baxtāfrīd. And he asked an agreement from them, "Do not keep these Yasnas in concealment, but do not teach the zand outside your offspring." They made the agreement with Husraw.³⁴

According to the Middle Persian texts the detriment or adversity to the "official" religion appears to be Mazdakite interpretation: "regarding the Mazdean religion they are of the opinion that by interpreting (the religion) they seek to remedy it."³⁵ This interpretation (Zand) caused instability in the religious circles, and Xusrō I attempted to contain the situation. Here we see an analogy with what Ardaxšīr I undertook when Alexander had brought havoc to religion and was able to re-arrange the *Avesta* and organize the religion. Xusrō I used this precedence, which in all probability was more Xusrō I's concoction of Ardaxšīr's policy, to justify his reforms and actions. Thus, the "Sasanian archetype" of the *Avesta* may have been first written down in the 4th AD,³⁶ but the time of Xusrō I may also be an attractive period for the final redaction of the text. The office of "The Judge and the Protector of the Poor,"³⁷ and the charitable endowments were established to bring peace to the society, invigorate the priestly institutions and Xusrō's proclamation to limit the teachings of the Zand to stop further religious schism and limit interpretation.

From the surviving material it appears that Xusrō I used the image of Ardaxšīr I, the founder of the dynasty, to implement changes in Sasanians society. Since Ardaxšīr I was only known from the material remains and the oral tradition, Xusrō I commissioned a history in the form of the *Kārnāmag ī*

34. C.G. Cereti, *The Zand ī Wahman Yasn, A Zoroastrian Apocalypse*, Rome, 1995, pp. 133-134, 150; M.-T. Rashid-Mohassel, *Zand ī Bahman Yasn*, Tehran, 1370, pp. 2, 50.

35. M. Shaki, "The Social Doctrine of Mazdak in Light of Middle Persian Evidence," *Archiv Orientalni* 46 (1978): 294.

36. K. Hoffmann has assigned the date to the fourth century CE: "Zum Zeicheninventar der Avesta-Schrift," *Aufsätze zur Indoiranistik I*, Wiesbaden, 1975, pp. 316-325.

37. T. Daryaei, "Modāfe'-e Darwīšān va Dāvar dar Zamān-e Sāsānīyān," *Yādnāme-ye Doctor Ahmad-e Tafazzoli*, A.-A. Sadeghi, ed., Tehran, 1379, pp. 179-187.

The Alexander-Mazdak / Ardaxšīr-Xusrō Paradigm

The Mazdakite movement was instrumental in the way in which Xusrō's father, Kawād I, was able to reduce the power of nobility and to restructure the economic, social and the religious foundations of the Sasanian society. Mazdak's dictums, however, had brought much grievance on the part of the priesthood, and had opened the Pandora's box of exegesis / Zand. In a sense while Mazdak reduced the power of the nobility and the priesthood for the king, it had also led to chaos in the sphere of religion. This was dangerous for Xusrō I, because of the Sasanian state needed to control the religious apparatus and its doctrines, so that the religion and state would function together. Again it is from the *Dēnkard III* where we first hear the well-known idea of the connection and alliance between the church and the state.³² It may be that it was in the 6th century AD that an idea of the alliance of the church and state took shape in Persia, where it was retrojected on the third century AD. In this way, the early Sasanians were also presented as the followers of such an idea, which in reality was not the case.³³

I contend that Xusrō I used the Alexander analogy and Ardaxšīr I's reorganization of the religion to combat Mazdak's doctrines, remedied the situation by introducing new institutions and introducing foreign learning into Sasanian Persia. One of the effects of Mazdak on the religious situation of the Sasanian empire was as follows (*ZWY II*):

*pad zand ī wahman yasn hordād yasn aštād yasn paydāg kū ēd bār
gizistug mazdak ī bāmdādān dēn petyārag ō paydāgih āmad u-šān
petyārag pad dēn yazišn kardan ud ān anōšag-ruwān husraw ī
kawādān māhdād ud šābuhr ī dādohrmazd ī ādurbādagān dastwar ud
ādur farrbay ī - a-drō ud ādurbād ī ādurmihr ud baxtāfrīd ō pēš xwāst
u-š paymān aziš xwāst kū ēn yasnihā pad nihān ma dārēd be pad
paywand ī ašmā zand ma čāšēd awēšān andar husraw paymān kard*

32. Ph. Gignoux in an important article has drawn attention to the issue that what the Middle Persian texts state in regard to the church-state alliance is the product of the post-Sasanian priestly tradition. Whereas in the Sasanian period there was not idealized alliance visible: "Church-State Relations in the Sasanian Period," *Monarchies and Socio-Religious Traditions in the Ancient Near East*, H.I.H. Prince and T. Mikasa, eds., Wiesbaden, 1984, pp. 72-80.

33. W. Hinz had already mentioned that the early Sasanians were not as good Zoroastrians as it has been assumed: "Mani and Kardēr," *La Persia nel medioevo*, Rome, 1971, pp. 485-499.

Platonic ideas are present in the *Dēnkard IV*,²⁹ which based on the linguistic evidence suggest that it was written during the time of Xusrō I.³⁰

So what did Alexander take from Persia, to be recovered later by the Sasanians? Another version of the “Alexander plunder” states more clearly what Alexander took to *hrōm* (*Dēnkard III*):

ud andar wizand ī az mar ī dušxwarr aleksandar ō ērānšahr ud dēn-xwadāyīh mad ān ī pad diz ī nibišt ō sōzišn ān ī (pad) ganj ī šāhīgān ō dast ī hrōmāyān mad u-š ō-iz yōnāyīg huzwān wizārd pad āgāhīh ī az pēšēnagān guft

During the disturbances, which came over Ērānšahr and the leadership of the religion from Alexander, the notorious scoundrel, the copy in the Royal Archives was burnt, and the second, the one in the Fortress of Writings, fell into the hands of the Romans and was translated into Greek, as is said in the tradition left (to us) from (our) ancestors.³¹

This passage is a very important and instrumental tool in Xusrō I’s propaganda. By then all the knowledge gathered by Xusrō I was already contained in the *ganj ī šāhīgān* (Royal Archives). In this way, Xusrō I could justify his incorporation, introduction, and inclusion of the Greek and Sanskrit material, because they had been part of Persian tradition. The text notes that Alexander took these learnings to *hrōm* “Rome.” Here in the very same location that philosophers, who were expelled from the Academy, found their way to the court of Xusrō I. The philosophers were returning what their ancestor (Alexander) had taken away some eight centuries ago. Thus Xusrō I used the Alexander burning episode to justify the incorporation of foreign learning, not only in the *Avesta*, but also the texts that were first introduced to the Sasanian empire in the 6th century AD.

267: *idem*, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture, The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early ‘Abbāsīd Society (2nd-4th / 8th-10th centuries)*. New York, 1998, pp. 25-26.

29. M. Shaki, “Some Basic Tenets of the Eclectic Metaphysics of the *Dēnkard*,” *Archiv Orientalní* 38 (1970): 297-301.

30. The mention of *im bay husraw šāhān šāh ī kawādān* “his present Majesty Xusrō, the son of Kawād,” suggests this fact.

31. Humbach, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

in disturbing the religion, Mazdak plays a similar role during the time of Xusrō I (*Dēnkard III B 316.21-317.1*):

ōy bay ardaxšīr šāhān šāh (ī) pābagān (abar) mad ō abāz ārāstārīh ī ērān xwadāyīh im nibēg az pargandagīh ō ēk gyāg āwurd ud pōryōtkēš ahlaw tōsar ī hērbedān hērbed būd abar mad ud abāg paydagīh ī az abistāg abāz handāxt az ān paydāgīh bawandagēnīdan framūd ud hamgōnag kard

His Majesty Ardaxšīr, the king of kings, son of Pābag, assumed command (gained ascendancy) for the restoration of the kingdom of Iran. He collected this book which was in a state of dispersion. And Tōsar, the ancient teacher of the faith, the righteous, who was the chief hērbed, assumed command and collated it with the exposition of the Avesta, and commanded that it should be made perfect on the basis of that same exposition; and thus did he do.²⁴

How much of the Greek and Indic material entered Iran during the time of Ardaxšīr I is not known. For one thing, neither Ardaxšīr, nor his envoys got to India and had time to bring Indian material. In fact, there is almost no evidence as such, and little if any for the time of his son, Šābuhr I. Only it is for the time of Xusrō I that we have solid external evidence for such contacts other than the Middle Persian sources. It was during the reign of Xusrō I that he sent his envoy (Burzōye) to India²⁵ and others to China,²⁶ and the coming of the Greek philosophers from Byzantium after the closing of the Academy by the emperor Justinian.²⁷ One can mention Paul the Persian, a contemporary of Xusrō I, who was able to make it possible for the incorporation of Greek (specifically Aristotelian) and Zoroastrian philosophical speculation.²⁸ Aristotelian and

24. *Ibid.*, pp. 53, 124.

25. For the evidence of Indian material entering Persia see F. de Blois, *Borzōy's Voyage to India and the Origin of the Book of Kalīlah wa Dimnah*, London, 1990.

26. I. Ecsedy, "Early Persian Envoys in the Chinese Courts," *Acta Ant. Hung.* 25 (1977): 227-236; P. Daffina, "La Persia Sassanide secondo le fonti cinesi," *Rivista degli Studi Orientali* LVII (1983/1985): 128.

27. J.-F. Duneau, "Quelques aspects de la pénétration de l'hellenisme dans l'Empire perse sassanide (IVe-VIe siècles)," *Mélanges offerts à René Crozet*, P. Gallais and Y.-J. Rioux, eds., Poitiers, 1966, Vol. I, pp. 13-22.

28. D. Gutas, "Paul the Persian on the Classification of the Parts of Aristotle's Philosophy: A Milestone between Alexandria and Bagdād," *Der Islam* 60 (1983): 231-

*drust pačcēn ō ganj ī šāhīgān dād (ān) framūd ud ēstēnīdan ī hamāg
arist (ag)-ān abar dēn māzdēs n ō uskār kard*

Šāhbur, the king of kings, son of Ardaxšīr, further collected the non-religious writings on medicine, astronomy, movement, time, space, substance, accident, becoming, decay, transformation, logic and other crafts and skills which were dispersed throughout India, Rome and other lands, and collated them with the Avesta, and commanded that a copy be made of all those (writings) which were flawless and be deposited in the Royal Treasury. And he put forward for deliberation the annexation of all those pure (teachings) to the Mazdean religion.²²

Here, India and Rome, i.e., Greece is mentioned as the location of the dispersed *Avesta*. Ardaxšīr then not only unified *Ērānšahr*, but also restored the religion (Zoroastrianism) and its “book,” i.e., the *Avesta*, which Alexander had his hands on. Interestingly Xusrō I plays the same role in the 6th century by bringing texts from Rome and India (*Dēnkard IV B 322.4-6*):

*im bay husraw šāhān šāh ī kawādān čiyōn-iš ahlamōyīh ud sāstārīh
spurr-hamēstārīhā wānīd pad paydāgīh az dēn andar har ahlamōyīh
gēhān hanjamanīh guft ku rāstīh ī dēn māzdēs n bē dānist ōšyārān pad
uskārišn ōstīgīhā tuwān pad gētīg bē ēstēnīd*

His present Majesty, Xusrō, the king of kings, son of Kawād, after he had put down heresy and evil dominion with the fullest antagonism, according to the revelation of the Religion he greatly promoted detailed knowledge and investigation in the matter of all heresy within the four estates.²³

In effect what Xusrō I was purporting to do was to gather, reclaim and re-assemble what had been taken away as “Persian knowledge,” i.e., the *Avesta*. It was in this way that he could include and introduce foreign learnings into *Ērānšahr*. Thus, here, there is a close analogy in the way Ardaxšīr I and Xusrō I attempted to collect and reorganize the religion. Also noteworthy is that in the same manner in which Alexander plays the villain

22. *Ibid.*, pp. 53-54, 119.

23. *Ibid.*, pp. 55, 120.

Dārā as mentioned in the *Dēnkard*, written down at the time of Xusrō I to grasp the history of the texts (*Dēnkard IV B 316.10-21*):

*dārāy ī dārāyān hamāg abistāg ud zand čiyōn zardušt az ohrmazd
padīrift nibištāg 2 paččēn ēk pad ganj ī šāhīgān ēk pad dīz ī nibišt
dāstan framūd*

Dārā, the son of Dārā, commanded that two written copies of all Avesta and Zand, even as Zoroaster had received them from Ohrmazd, be preserved; one in the Royal Treasury, and one in the fortress of Archives.²⁰

Thus, we have two copies of the *Avesta* mentioned to have existed. We do not yet know what is contained in the *Avesta*, rather only its existence as a written text which was violated by Alexander the Great. It continues that Ardaxšīr I attempts to recover lost *Avesta* (*Dēnkard IV B 321.9-11*):

*ōy bay ardaxšīr šāhān šāh ī pābagān pad rāst dastwarīh ī tōsar ān-iz
hammōg ī pargandag hamāg ō dar xwāst tōsar abar mad ān ī ēwar
frāz padīrift ud abārīg az dastwar hišt*

His Majesty Ardaxšīr, the king of kings, son of Pābag, acting on the just judgement of Tōsar, demanded that all those scattered teachings to be brought to the court. Tōsar assumed command; he selected those which were trustworthy, and left the rest out of the canon.²¹

Here we have an analogy to the way in which the New Testament was collected which may be drawing on the Christian tradition. Initially, it is not clear where the information is kept or scattered, but the content of it is mentioned as such during Šābuhr's rule (*Dēnkard IV B 321.3-20*):

*šābuhr šāhān šāh ī ardaxšīrān nibēgīhā-iz az dēn bē abar bizišgīh ud
star-gōwišnīh (ud) čandišn ud zamān ud gyāg ud gōhr (ud) jahišn ud
bawišn ud wināsišn ud jadag-wihērīh ud gōwāgīh ud abārīg kīrrōgīh
ud abzār andar hindōgān ud hrōm (ud) abārīg-iz zamīgīhā pargandag
būd abāz ō ham āwurd ud abāg abistāg abāz handāxt ud har ān ī*

20. M. Shaki, "The *Dēnkard* Account of the History of the Zoroastrian Scriptures," *Archiv Orientalni* 49 (1981): 118; H. Humbach, *The Gāthās of Zarathushtra and the Other Old Avestan Texts*, Part I, Introduction – Text and Translation, Heidelberg, 1991, p. 51.

21. *Ibid.*, pp. 53, 119.

of Xusrō I, i.e., Wuzurgmihr who dispelled the riddle of the game of chess and constructed the backgammon to confound the Indian wisemen. This is part of Sasanian imperial propaganda in the 6th century AD, where the Sasanian empire was made to be the best and more magnanimous than all, surpassing the Indian and the Roman empires.

Finally, another piece of evidence suggests that the *Kārnāmag* is a later concoction. This has to do with the time when Ardaxšīr has taken flight from the grasp of Artabanus V and is in hiding, when two old women recognize him and call him as such (*KAP* III.19):

ardaxšīr ī kay ī pābagān az tōhmag ī sāsān nāf ī dārāy šāh

Ardaxšīr the Kayanid, son of Pābag, from the lineage of Sāsān, ancestor of king Dārā.

As is well known the designation and use of the Kayanid title (*kay*) based on the coins appear to be from the fifth century AD,¹⁸ where a new view of the past was constructed and the Sasanians became the ancestors of the Kayanids mentioned in the *Avesta*.¹⁹ Thus, again here we have the retrojection of a fifth century AD concepts on the early 3rd century AD. Whatever the merits of the *Kārnāmag* may be, it does not reflect and elucidate on the realities of the 3rd century and the history of Ardaxšīr I, but rather the 6th century AD Sasanian society reflecting on its past.

Xusrō I's Religious and Intellectual Outlook

It is in the religious and intellectual policies of Xusrō I that we again realize his campaign of grandeur and magnanimity, and the aim to reinvigorate the empire. The *Dēnkard*, books III and IV provides a preview of the history and a glimpse into the content of the *Avesta*. We need to go back to the time of

18. T. Daryaee, "History, Epic, and Numismatics: On the Title of Yazdgerd I (Rāmšahr)," *The American Numismatic Journal* 14 (2002): 93.

19. T. Daryaee, "National History or Kayanid History? The Nature of Sasanid Zoroastrian Historiography," *Iranian Studies* 28/3-4 (1995): 129-141; *idem*, "Memory and History: The Construction of the Past in Late Antique Persia," *Nāme-ye Irān-e Bāstān, The International Journal of Ancient Iranian Studies* 1/2 (2001-2): 1-14; A.Sh. Shahbazi, "Early Sasanians' Claim to Achaemenid Heritage," *Nāme-ye Irān-e Bāstān, The International Journal of Ancient Iranian Studies* 1/1 (2001): 61-73.

...az tōhmag ī dārāy ī dārāyān būd (ud) andar duš-xwadāyih ī
aleksandar ō wirēg ud nihān-rawišnīh ēstād ud abāg kurdān šubānān
raft (7) pābag nē dānist kū sāsān az tōhmag ī dārāy ī dārāyān zād ēstēd

(Sāsān) was from the lineage of Dārā, son of Dārā (Darius III) and during the evil-rule of Alexander he escaped and went about in the manner of concealment, and lived with the Kurdish shepherds. Pābag did not know that Sāsān was born from the lineage of Dārā, son of Dārā (Darius III).

Sāsān's lineage is then revealed to Pābag who is said to be (1.3) *marzbān ud šahryār ī pārs* (margrave and ruler of Pārs/Fārs). Ardaxšīr is born from the union of Sāsān and Pābag's daughter, whom Pābag himself decides to keep. Of course, he is so talented that the reigning Parthian king of kings, Artabanus V, decides to invite him to his court to grow up along with the princes. There, as well, Ardaxšīr demonstrates exceptional talent in the following things (*KAP* II.12):

*pad yazdān ayyārīh pad cōbēgān ud aswārīh čatrang ud nēw-ardaxšīr
ud abārīg frahang az awēšān hāmōyēn čēr ud niwardag būd*

With the aid of the gods he was (more) victorious and experienced than all of them in polo and horsemanship and chess and backgammon and other learnings.

It is evident that some of the games mentioned here do not appear to be from the time of Ardaxšīr I, rather they are from the time of Xusrō I. The games of chess and backgammon as are mentioned in another text, *Wizārišn ī Čatrang ud Nihīšn ī Nēw-Ardaxšīr* (The Explanation of Chess and Invention of Backgammon) assigns the invention of these games to the court of Xusrō I in the 6th century AD.¹⁶ Either the *Kārnāmag* or *Wizārišn Čatrang* is falsifying the matter. It is more prudent to think that with the entrance of the steady stream of science and learnings into Persia during the time of Xusrō I, these games also entered the Sasanian empire. Most likely, these games were introduced to Persia from India along with a variety of works transmitted in the 6th century AD.¹⁷ Another matter must be mentioned in regard to the *Wizārišn Čatrang*. This text states that it was the wise minister

16. T. Daryaee, "Mind, Body and the Cosmos: Chess and Backgammon in Ancient Persia," *Iranian Studies* 35/4 (2002): 283-284.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 285.

His coins also portray him as a king whose typology became the model for all later Sasanian coins. The legends on his coins and the inscriptions give us very little information on Ardaxšīr I life and reforms in the 3rd century AD. For example, with his rock relief at Naqš-e Rostam, we only have the following line: (ANRm-a): *ptkr-y ZNH mzdysn bgy 'rthštr MLK'n MLK' 'yr'n MNW ctry MN yzd'n / pahikar ēn mazdēsn bay ardašīr šāhān šāh ērān kē cīhr az yazdān* "This is the image of the Mazda-worshiping Majesty, Ardaxšīr, King of Kings of Ērān, whose origin (is) from the gods."¹¹ The longest legend on the coinage of Ardaxšīr does not go beyond this,¹² and the only other contribution that the coins make is the fire-altar on the reverse.¹³ To anyone at the time (3rd century AD), these materials would have represented Ardaxšīr as a *mazdēsn* (Mazda-worshiper) and a good Zoroastrian. With such a *vitae* Ardaxšīr I would have been the ideal candidate for being used as a model monarch who was little known in the 6th century AD. But it was up to Xusrō I to make this history and that appears most succinctly in the *Kārnāmag ī Ardaxšīr ī Pābagān* (The *Vitae* of Ardaxšīr, the son of Pābag).¹⁴ It is in this text that we have the heroic and royal image of Ardaxšīr envisioned in a text that by all account is now attributed to the 6th or 7th century AD.¹⁵ In terms of his origin, his father's lineage is mentioned as such in the *Kārnāmag* (KAP I.6-7):

11. M. Back, *Die Sassanidischen Staatsinschriften*, Leiden, 1978, p. 281. ANRm-a ends with *pūs bay šāh* "son of the Majesty, king Pābag."

12. M. Alram, *Nomina Propria Iranica in Nummis: Materialgrundlagen zu den iranischen Personennamen auf antiken Münzen*. *Iranisches Personennamenbuch* (4), M. Mayrhofer and R. Schmitt, eds., Vienna, 1986; *idem*, "The Beginning of the Sasanian Coinage," *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* 13 (1999): 67-76; M. Alram and R. Gyselen, *Sylloge Nummorum Sasanidarum Pars-Berlin-Wien*, Vol. I, Wien, 2003, p. 53.

13. For contemporary sources relating to Ardaxšīr I promoting Zoroastrianism see K. Mosig-Walburg, *Die Frühen sassanidischen Könige als Vertreter und Förderer der zarathustrischen religion*, Frankfurt-Bern, 1982.

14. For the latest edition see O.M. Chukanova, *Kniga deianii Ardashira syna Papaka*, Moscow, 1987.

15. There are several possible dates for the final redaction of the *Vitae* of Ardaxšīr. Chukanova suggests 23 December 631 AD, *op. cit.*, p. 24. Although Panaino is hesitant to use the astronomical data for dating the text, he gives one possibility, that is 4-28 September 578 AD: "The Two Astrological Reports of the *Kārnāmag ī Ardaxšīr ī Pābagān*," *Die Sprache* 36 (1994): 189.

propaganda. This was done by making Ardaxšīr I's ambitions the same as that of the Achaemenid empire. As has been shown by E. Kettenhofen, such Classical views must be used with caution.⁶ Even Agathias in the 6th century AD who went to the royal archive at Ctesiphon, read and saw only what was the product of Xusrō I's recording of the third century, i.e., the *Xwadāy-nāmag* material.⁷ Thus, he can only supply Roman (negative) and Persian (heroic) account of Ardaxšīr I constructed by the priestly-scribal class under the direction of Xusrō I.⁸ The Christian sources such as the *Chronicle of Arbela* were written in the 6th century AD, and may reflect Xusrō I and Sasanian propaganda of the "6th century Ardaxšīr."⁹ The Armenian and Georgian sources naturally are also later and tend to be hostile to the Sasanians because of their knowledge of Ardaxšīr I and his actions in the Caucuses from an either local oral tradition, or from the very same Sasanian sources. The later Arabic and Persian sources are also wholly dependent on the lost *Xwadāy-nāmag* which was the product of Xusrō I's redaction of Ardaxšīr's history.¹⁰

Thus what we are left with for the contemporary sources for Ardaxšīr I are his rock reliefs which show him as heroic (at Salmas), and victorious in his battle against Artabanus V (Ardawān V) (at Fērōzābād); and majestic, righteous and the legitimate representative of God (Ohrmazd) on earth (Fērōzābād by Mihr-Narseh's Bridge; Naqš-e Rostam, and Naqš-e Rājab).

6. E. Kettenhofen, "Die Einforderung der achaimenidischen Territorien durch die Sāsāniden – eine Bilanz," *Yād-nāme-ye Iradj Khalifeh-Soltani*, Aachen, 2002, pp. 49-75. The other possibility is that the Classical historians may have simply misinterpreted Sasanian aspirations. For this possibility see T. Daryaei, "Sasanians and their Ancestors," *The Fifth European Studies Conference*, Ravenna, forthcoming.

7. A. Sh. Shahbazi, "On the *Xwadāy-nāmag*," *Iranica Varia: Papers in Honor of Professor Ehsan Yarshater*, Leiden, 1990, pp. 208-229.

8. For the influence and unjust view of Agathias on the Sasanians now see the important article by J. T. Walker, "The Limits of Late Antiquity: Philosophy between Rome and Iran," *The Ancient World*, Vol. 33, no. 1, pp. 45-69.

9. For the text now see P. Kawerau, *Die Chronik von Arbela CSCO*, Louvain, 1985. This history of course simply reflects on Syriac local history which is focused on the life of Bishops.

10. The end result would be G. Widengren's work on Ardaxšīr, "The Establishment of the Sasanian Dynasty in the Light of New Evidence," *La Persia nel medioevo*, Rome, 1971, pp. 711-782, where the new evidence is again an Islamic source. I believe to a large extent the information on the birth and locality of Ardaxšīr I would have been left unmolested by Xusrō I.

a) administrative and fiscal; b) military; and c) religious. His reforms will not be the focus of this essay, as they have been studied more recently, but they need to be briefly mentioned. Xusrō I reformed the tax system of the Sasanian empire, where taxes were levied based on the type of produce and the amount of the produce. Ērānšahr was divided administratively and militarily into four *kusts* (regions), where a *dīwān* (bureau/department) was setup for each *kust*, and a *dīwān ī jund* / (Arabic) *dīwān al-jund* (bureau of war) was established.³ The office of *Ērānšahr Spāhbed* (general of the empire) was now divided among four *Spāhbeds*, attending each *kust*.⁴ Finally Mazdak's ideas which had gained the support of his father, Kawād I, and the ability to reduce the power of the priests and the nobility, it had also brought religious schism and anarchy. Xusrō I not only had to react to Mazdak, but also bring back order to the empire.

These are amazing and incredible feats in the face of internal problems and an all powerful Roman empire under the rulership of Justinian. In this essay I would like to suggest that Xusrō I created the image of an ideal monarch in the dress of Ardaxšīr I, the founder of the Sasanian dynasty. Xusrō I emulated and used Ardaxšīr as a point of reference, to revive the empire, making the empire "perfect," as it was during the time of Ardaxšīr I. These ideas, however, were to a large extent Xusrō I's construction of the image of Ardaxšīr. In fact what the Middle Persian and Perso-Arabic sources state in terms of the accomplishments of Ardaxšīr I, may mainly reflect the imperial propaganda of Xusrō I.⁵ This was done to justify Xusrō's actions and reforms in the face of problems that had arisen in the 5th and 6th centuries AD.

Let us look at the evidence for Ardaxšīr I's reign. The only contemporary sources for Ardaxšīr's reign are his rock reliefs, coins and minor inscriptions. As has been shown the contemporary Classical sources, such as Dio Cassius and Herodian tend to reflect Roman views and Roman imperial

3. A. Tafazzoli, *Sasanian Society*, New York, 2000, p. 23.

4. For recent sigillographic evidence see R. Gyselen, *The Four Generals of the Sasanian Empire: Some Sigillographic Evidence*, Rome, 2001.

5. Tabarī states that Xusrō I "set himself to pursue the conduct, the writings, and the legal decisions of Ardašīr, and took them as a model to imitate, urging people to do likewise," *The History of al-Tabarī, the Sāsānides, the Byzantines, the Lakmids, and Yemen*, Vol. V, New York, 1999, p. 157. E. Yarshater had already mentioned that Xusrō I had tampered with the earlier Sasanian tradition and gave us the earlier history of the Sasanian empire through his vision, see the discussion to W. Hinz "Mani and Kardēr," *La Persia nel medioevo*, Rome, 1971, p. 502.